

# Of the Night

by mathmonkey167

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Summary: Yet even as he carried the humans in a roundabout way back to the village, something had wormed its way into the back of the dragon's mind, and though Toothless ruthlessly suppressed it, the feeling had made itself clear. Loneliness.

## 1. Chapter 1

**\*\*Hi this is my first fanfic ever so please review and let me know what you think! HTTYD2 SPOILERS ABOUND\*\***

**\*\*Notice: I (sadly) do not own How To Train Your Dragon.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless lounged on the cliff top, looking out over the expanse of ocean before him, glowing orange beneath the setting sun. The sky seemed to blaze with a lazy fire, a bold spectrum of color streaked with passing clouds. The brightest of stars were just appearing, faint in the dusk behind him. Even a dragon like him, seemingly designed for destruction and mindless savagery, could appreciate the beauty of the moment.<p>

It had been a year since he had defeated the Alpha Bewilderbeast, and he was now 21 years old. Very young for a dragon, let alone the Alpha of an entire island full of strong, independent dragons. Despite his youth, he was strong, and fully matured. Toothless sighed, rested his head on his front paws. He and Hiccup rarely had a moment to spare anymore, each of them dealing with his own set of demands, surrounded constantly by a never-ending stream of humans and reptiles. And even in their precious spare time, Hiccup had to divide his time between his best friend and his love.

Speaking of love—| Toothless peered over the edge of the cliff, down to the beach below. A blanket rested on the sand, and laying on it

were two humans. They didn't appear to be talking, just resting peacefully in each other's arms. As the sun slipped across the horizon, the larger human- his human, Hiccup- sat up and pulled his companion onto her knees. He (Hiccup, that is) turned his back to the sun and, on his knees, began to speak to Astrid, the other human. Toothless, along with Hiccup, had become very fond of Astrid, and she seemed to feel the same.

Toothless had, in fact, flown the two of them to this very spot before disappearing up the cliff to give them privacy. Hiccup had explained the importance of this moment to Toothless, and the dragon was certain his human had never looked so nervous, not even in the face of Outcasts, crazed and power-hungry maniacs like Drago, not even when facing bloodthirsty wild dragons that even gave Toothless pause. Images of the Red Death, the Screaming Death, and the great black Bewilderbeast flashed through the dragon's mind, and he shook his head, clearing away the dark thoughts. He and Hiccup had been victorious over all of their foes, each mightier than the last. There had been sacrifices, and losses, but ultimately the two had become joined not just as companions, but mentally as well. Hiccup was so in tune with Toothless that the black dragon swore his human understood Dragonese.

Back to the moment. Vivid green eyes studied the tableau on the white sand below. The sun continued its decline, and Hiccup's voice drifted up to Toothless's sensitive ears. He caught a few phrases like "I love you" and "would you make me the happiest" which made sense to the dragon, as his human was partaking in the ancient ritual of finding a mate and making her his. Toothless wasn't sure if he would be so sentimental if he ever found a mate (he scoffed mentally at this. There were no other Night Furies, and while he enjoyed the company of Stormfly and the others, he would never consider any of them to be a mate. His mate.)

A scream brought Toothless back to reality and alarmed, he leapt to his feet and looked over the edge. Astrid had tackled Hiccup and was attempting to eat his face, which Toothless had learned was something humans did as an act of affection. (A strange act, to be sure.) Hiccup was laughing and kissing her back, and after a few moments he pulled away from her to remove a small object from one of the many hidden pockets on his leather flight suit. A sparkle caught Toothless's attention as Hiccup slipped something shiny onto Astrid's finger. Toothless made a mental note to get a closer look at the possible toy later.

The sun had vanished and a great, full moon was rising. That was the black dragon's cue to silently swoop down and offer the couple his transportation services through the starry sky. They sailed through the gentle air currents, Hiccup sitting behind Astrid for once as he held her in his arms, trusting Toothless and the dragon's independent prosthetic to keep them airborne.

Toothless was thrilled that his human was so happy. Astrid was going to be around quite a bit more, he reasoned, which could potentially mean more fish, if Toothless utilized his helpless, pleading, adorable (which he would never admit to any other dragon) gaze at the right times.

The black dragon silently flew over the wind-ruffled sea, cleverly re-enacting the couple's very first flight together. He coasted

around the recently reconstructed monoliths with their massive torches, and soared between perfectly puffy white clouds and the brilliant stars above until they could see the lights of Berk flickering in the distance.

Yet even as he carried the humans in a roundabout way back to the village, something had wormed its way into the back of the dragon's mind, and though Toothless ruthlessly suppressed it, the feeling had made itself clear.

Loneliness.

\* \* \*

><p>Far away, a lone dragon flew over the raging sea through a violent storm. It was exhausted, battered by wind and rain, and slowly descending despite its best efforts to remain in the air. Each flap of its perfectly formed wings was more strained than the last, and it panted with the effort of flight.<p>

The hurricane was relentless, as though the gods themselves had taken it upon themselves to punish the slim dragon. Lightning flashed around it, blinding and scorching hot. With a deafening crack, the dragon was struck, and soundlessly it hung suspended in the electricity before the second passed. Its body plummeted toward the dark ocean, and was swallowed by the waves.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hello, new friends! I'm adding this note as I prepare to finish posting the last two chapters of this story. I have an offer standing, to anyone interested. There is a sequel in the works, and so I have decided to give the 100th reviewer (whoever and whenever that might be) a sneak peek at it. If I've already begun posting it, then the lucky winner gets a preview of a future chapter. Sound good?<strong>

\*\*Thanks for reading :) I hope you enjoy this story as much as I have enjoyed writing it. \*\*

## 2. Chapter 2

Toothless had been with Hiccup since early that morning, chasing down a herd of escaped sheep from the upper pastures, and was therefore unable to join the rest of the dragons for breakfast. This was not unusual, and none of the other dragons questioned their Alpha's absence. Although it was rarely spoken of, they all admired and even adored the powerful Night Fury, trusting him completely. Even before he had defeated the Alpha Bewilderbeast he had been a force to be reckoned with, regardless of his missing tailfin, and now that he was the Alpha no one dared speak against him, not out of fear, but out of respect.

True, some dragons envied him, and some secretly wished to become closer with him, to simply be in his presence. You know the saying. Some dragons wanted him, some dragons wanted to be him.

But he denied, hesitantly at first and more firmly as time passed, any attentions from the female dragons. While lovestruck, \_most \_of

them knew how to take a hint, and turned their efforts elsewhere. The others, while backing off, still secretly harbored the hope of becoming, ah, \_special \_to the Alpha, with various motivations.

As it happened, Stormfly had become one of those dragons. Over the years, she had become close to Toothless, and considered him one of her best friends. The last year had pained her, as the black dragon had been forced to spend more and more of his time away from his small group of friends. They were all young, but along with their riders, had reached maturity and were looking for companionship. Stormfly, while she was aware she could not reproduce with the Night Fury, sought to become that special someone. However, she was quite vain, and her vanity often kept her distanced from the proud but much more subtle Alpha. All truth be told, Toothless cared deeply for Stormfly and the other dragons, but again, friendship was all he sought, from \_any \_of the dragons on or around Berk.

Frustrated with Toothless's continued absence, and with their riders occupied elsewhere, Stormfly, Hookfang, Barf and Belch, and Meatlug went flying around the island to allay their boredom. As they soared, they bantered back and forth. Meatlug, sweet as she was, didn't join in but observed with good-natured interest. Stormfly was only half involved, and as they flew over the calm sea she couldn't help but gaze upon her striking features. Her shining blue scales and her deadly spikes as they were reflected on the waterâ€| until Hookfang purposely swept his wing along the surface, disturbing her image and earning himself a swift kick to the side from the miffed blue dragon. It amused the other dragons on the island to no end how much the first trained dragons behaved so similarly to their riders.

Barf and Belch had turned from the conversation and were animatedly bumping heads and playfully arguing (just as their riders often did) when Hookfang, looking off into the distance, noticed something on the beach. Curious, he called to gain the others' attention and swooped lower, accelerating until he reached the small stretch of sand along the cliffs.

"What is it?" asked Stormfly, landing besides him. Barf and Belch soon followed, and after a few minutes Meatlug landed as well, not at all put off by the other dragons' speed.

She was greeted by the sight of her friends' backs, all of them standing motionless and silent. "What is it?" The Gronkle nervously asked. When they failed to respond, she crept slowly forward until she could see past the frozen Nightmare's shoulder. What she saw stopped her in her tracks. Wordlessly her jaw dropped, and stared with the rest of them at what had washed up onto the shores of their well-ordered, well-run island home.

This was going to change everything.

\* \* \*

><p>"Cloudjumper!"<p>

The male Stormcutter turned from the fish he was about to devour and gave a winded Stormfly and the others a questioning glance. "What is it?" he rumbled.

The three dragons- Stormfly, Barf and Belch, and Meatlug- shifted

nervously before Meatlug half spoke, half shouted: "Where is Alpha Toothless?"

Cloudjumper frowned and fully turned to face them, forgetting his fish. Promptly a small cloud of Terrible Terrors descended upon the pile behind him, and silently, swiftly managed to relocate all of Cloudjumper's fish to an unknown location without alerting the large dragon.

"You know that the Alpha has many concerns. Anything you must tell him, you can tell me. I will relay it to him." \_If I deem it necessary. \_The words were unspoken, but his meaning was clear. Stormfly blinked, then cautiously said, "This can't wait. Please, where is Toothless? He needs to-"

The blue dragon was cut off by a deepening scowl from Cloudjumper. She stepped back, alarmed, and Cloudjumper immediately looked to the sky and sighed. He looked back at the uneasy group of dragons, part of the \_original \_trained dragons of Berk, and sensed their growing anxiety. He spoke, more gently. "I know you have known him longer than you have known me, but you must trust me as the Alpha does."

The dragons looked between themselves, communicating wordlessly. Finally they turned back to a patient Cloudjumper and said simply: "We found something."

\* \* \*

><p>From the distance they could see Hookfang's fiery red body as he guarded his find on the shore. Cloudjumper sailed slightly apart from the three other dragons, but it hardly mattered as not one of them made a sound.<p>

As they flew closer, Cloudjumper began to frown. Something wasn't rightâ€|

Stormfly, Barf and Belch, and Meatlug landed quietly and didn't move any closer.

Still frowning, but incredibly curious, Cloudjumper landed remarkably silently for his size and approached the red Nightmare, who turned quickly towards him. "I found it, can I keep it?"

The Stormcutter was about to reply when he finally saw what rested on the soft white sand. No words escaped his mouth as his jaw dropped. Like the others, he could only stare.

### 3. Chapter 3

\*\*Thanks to xltearslx for the nice review :) makes me feel a little more confident! Hope you guys like where this is going...\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless grumbled as he rolled his stiff shoulders. It was late in the afternoon, and although he only wanted to curl up and sleep, he knew that he needed to spend some time with the other dragons. He left Hiccup with Astrid and Valka and meandered through the village,

following the scent of fish.<p>

As he passed them, dragons would bow their heads and murmur, "Alpha." Even the hulking Vikings would tip their helmets at him and nod their respects.

This only served to irritate Toothless further. Why couldn't the other dragons treat him like he was one of them? Everything he did, it was for them. Well, he mostly did it for Hiccup, but in the end it was for the benefit of all on the island.

His heart sank. \_No. \_He was a Night Fury, the last of his kind, and he would proudly bear the weight of his new position as Alpha until it was time to pass the honor onto another. \_The last of his kind \_rang in his tired mind, and again Toothless was forced to suppress that sneaky feeling slithering through him, thatâ€| loneliness.

Finally he made his way to the feeding stations, where the dragons already there parted to give him plenty of room. Toothless refused to feel the pang at the memory of familiarly and cheerfully bumping shoulders with all the hungry dragons vying for food. Vaguely he wondered with some disappointment where Stormfly and the others were. Putting on a good-natured face, nodded at the other dragons there before helping himself to some nice Icelandic cod.

However, it wasn't long before he heard a distant "Alpha! Where is the Alpha?!" Sighing, the Night Fury turned, only to see Cloudjumper hurrying towards him. Toothless took in the sight of the flustered Stormcutter and wondered briefly at what could possibly have disturbed his cool, collected demeanor. He didn't have to wonder for long when Cloudjumper breathlessly spoke.

"Alpha-"

"Call me Toothless."

"My apologies. Alpha Toothless-"

A growl. Through gritted teeth: "\_Just Toothless.\_"

Cloudjumper, momentarily taken aback by the smaller black dragon's command, hurriedly agreed before continuing. "There's something you need toâ€|" Glancing around, the Stormcutter noticed the large crowd of dragons gathered around the Alpha and his second in command. Cloudjumper lowered his voice. "You need to see this."

Toothless, still frustrated that he had to tell \_Cloudjumper \_of all dragons to call him by his name, interrupted. "Can it wait?"

The larger dragon solemnly shook his head. "No."

The Night Fury's irritation quickly became concern. "Lead the way."

\* \* \*

><p>They sped through the sky. Even with four wings, Cloudjumper was hard pressed to keep up with Toothless, who was still only flying at the equivalent of a Night Fury jog. After refusing to reveal any more

information to his Alpha, the two had flown towards the setting sun in silence.<p>

As they drew near, Toothless noticed several dragons gathered around a strange dark shape in the sand. \_Waitâ€| was that Hookfang? And the others?\_ His concern and curiosity growing, he blasted through the air, leaving Cloudjumper behind in his haste.

The Night Fury dropped to the ground behind his friends, who turned to look at him, but still concealed what they had found. Strangely, none of them said a word.

Suddenly, he smelled it. Faintlyâ€| growing stronger. The scent was unmistakable. Eyes widening, and his heart racing, Toothless slowly walked towards the others, still sniffing the air. He barely noticed Cloudjumper landing behind him, and didn't even register the Stormcutter's words. "Al- Toothless, wait. You need toâ€|"

The words were lost as the black dragon suddenly leapt through his friends and stared at their find.

Toothless cocked his head, too shocked to comprehend what he was seeing.

Behind him, Hookfang whispered to Stormfly, "Do you think he'll let me keep it?"

"No." The word was a whisper from the Alpha.

For before them on the sand, silhouetted by the sunset, was the body of a Night Fury.

#### 4. Chapter 4

\*\*Can't sleep, so I'm just sitting here writing away! Hope you like it so far! Please review, but go easy on me, I'm new at this!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless didn't know what to do.<p>

\_Toothless. Toothless. \_"Toothless!"

Startled, he slightly turned his head towards Cloudjumper, keeping the Night Fury in the corner of his vision, as if he expected it to jump up and attack, or worseâ€| run away.

The Stormcutter actually looked anxious. "Toothlessâ€| I think it's alive. But it's badly injured. Look at it." Toothless returned his shocked gaze back to the body on the sand, finally noticing the crooked wing, and then the terrible, bloody marks on its black hide. \_Were those burns? \_They were unlike any burns Toothless had ever seen.

"Al- Toothless." Again Cloudjumper interrupted Toothless's reverie. "Is it a male? Orâ€|" he couldn't even finish the thought.

Toothless briefly smelled the air, and only his state of shock prevented him from having a complete heart attack. "â€| Female."

She was completely unconscious, but she was breathing. Barely. Toothless cursed the dragons behind him for leaving her on the sand all day, in the sun before inching closer to her body. She was smaller than he was, maybe two-thirds of his size. Could he take her in a fight? How old is she? Where is she from? Why is she here? What is her name? These thoughts and more spiraled in Toothless's mind as he used the tip of his wing to lift the female's unbroken one. Beneath it were terrible claw marks, still bleeding. She had to have a few broken ribs. Toothless wasn't one for the Vikings' religion, but he prayed to the gods right then that nothing more was wrong with her.

He refused to pray for anything else.

Hiccup could help her.

The thought flashed and quickly he turned to the other dragons. "We have to get her back to Hiccup. Now."

"Toothless," Stormfly approached cautiously. "Look at her. We can't move her."

The sun was almost gone, and Toothless knew that while the sun probably wasn't ideal for the dragon's battered body, the freezing temperatures of night could possibly kill her. He shut his eyes, completely at a loss. Finally he looked up at the dragons gathered around him, watching him with concern. "Get Hiccup, then. Bring him here. Oh, and Gobber, too." As an afterthought, he told Stormfly, "Bring Astrid too."

Turning back to the others the Alpha continued to issue orders. "Get blankets. Make sure they understand they will need medical supplies. Bandages. If you can bring clean water maybe we can heat it to clean her wounds."

Four of his friends immediately leapt up and flew off at his commands, but Cloudjumper hesitated. He knew exactly what was going through his Alpha's head. Mostly, he could sense Toothless's fear. Fear of finding something so incredibly important, only to lose it, with no answers.

Toothless had returned to look upon the unconscious Night Fury before him. He didn't dare hope for anything, anything at all. His tail and wings drooped, along with his ears, and he sighed heavily. "Cloudjumper, maybe you should bring Valka, too. But I don't want any other humans to know about this."

"Understood." The Stormcutter took off, leaving Toothless alone to guard the barely alive dragon at his feet. He could already feel the chill of the evening as the last of the sun's rays streaked out from the horizon.

Toothless hesitated before laying down beside her, gently putting his wing over her in an effort to keep her warm. He had a nagging feeling that the excitement was only just beginning.

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup leapt off of Stormfly and sprinted (as best he could with



his prosthetic) toward the dark shapes huddled farther down the beach. Astrid dismounted as well, patting Stormfly's neck before running after Hiccup, axe in hand.<p>

"Toothless!" Hiccup shouted. "Is something wrong? Are you okay, bud?"

The dragon in question looked up at his human with bright green eyes, so vivid they were visible in the darkness. He seemed to be at a loss. Slowly he lifted up his wing, revealing the other dragon.

Hiccup staggered back, and Astrid gasped.

"Hiccup!" Valka shouted as Cloudjumper landed. Barf and Belch followed, each head carrying a bucket of water. Finally Meatlug, carrying Gobber and his supply kit, touched down.

"Momâ€¦" Hiccup almost couldn't breathe. Pulling out his fire sword, he lit the blade and used it to examine the unconscious black dragon. "We need a fire!" he yelled. Astrid nodded and darted over to some trees growing at the edge of the sand, and used her axe to hack off some branches.

Gobber stumbled over, and Valka smoothly caught his elbow before reaching Hiccup and Toothless.

"Oh myâ€¦" she whispered. "Oh, Hiccup!"

Hiccup knelt beside his best friend. "Toothless, I know you probably don't want to, but you need to let us see, um him?" Toothless shook his head. "Ah, her, so we can help her."

His dragon hesitated before nodding once, and slowly he stood before backing away slowly, not going far before sitting on his haunches, watching vigilantly.

Astrid returned with the branches and Toothless carefully lit one with his blue fire. The Vikings gathered around the fallen Night Fury and examined her in the firelight. Valka spoke first. "Hiccupâ€¦ she is gravely wounded."

The Chief nodded before asking, "What is this strange burn on her back? I've never seen anything like it."

Gobber responded first. "I've seen it before on a few unlucky Vikings, but never on a dragonâ€¦ This dragon's been struck by lightning." Every pair of eyes on the beach widened at the announcement.

"What do we do?" asked Astrid.

"Well, since ye askedâ€¦" Gobber began digging around in his pouch. He had become something of an herbalist in recent years, because Gothi, while she loved her Terrible Terrors, was strictly a human healer.

Gobber pulled out two small satchels, and a sprig of dried something. Toothless leaned in and sniffed it. It had a cool and pleasant smell, so he nodded his approval before scooting back.

The old blacksmith instructed the others on how to create a paste with the ingredients in the satchels, and how to brew something for the dragon to drink with the sprig of whatever it was. "A little dragon tea," he grinned, rolling the R in dragon and showing off his missing teeth.

After a while the salve was made, and the 'tea' was ready. Gently the humans got to work rubbing the paste over the dragon's deeper wounds before bandaging them. Gobber, meanwhile, had pried open the dragon's mouth and was trickling the tea down her throat, slowly so she wouldn't choke.

"Gobber, what do we do about her wing?" asked Hiccup, his face flickering with shadows in the firelight.

"Well, lad, we don' have much to make a splint out of here, so we've got to get her back to the village to build somethin' a little more stable."

"Can we move her tonight?" Astrid questioned, already knowing the answer.

"No, lass," Gobber responded, "the move might kill her."

No one spoke after that, but prepared for a long night of keeping watch. Hiccup tried to convince Astrid to go home and get some rest, but she quietly laughed in his face before giving him a quick kiss and sitting down by the fire. He turned to tell his mother the same thing but she simply smiled and put a hand on his shoulder. "We're going to see this through."

## 5. Chapter 5

The next few days passed in a blur. The Vikings traveled back and forth to the village, bringing supplies without alerting any of the other villagers to their purpose. Toothless and his close friends kept watch over the beach, but mostly it was Toothless, for the others seemed somewhat nervous to get too close.

Toothless, in his weariness, had begun to talk to her. Refusing to sleep, he instead kept up a stream of random information, with the strange idea that maybe the unconscious Night Fury might hear him. None of the other dragons had noticed this yet. Sighing, the Alpha paused his ramble, and looked out at the late afternoon sun. Three days. Gobber's mysterious salve and 'tea' seemed to be working, as most of her wounds had ceased bleeding. Now it was just a matter of healing the rest of her battered body. Everyone involved feared in their own minds that the downed dragon might have internal injuries too severe to treat.

Again, he wondered, \_What is her name? \_Perhaps he would never know. He didn't want to build her funeral pyre when he didn't even know her name. The thought brought an oppressive sadness upon him.

Toothless shook his head. \_No. \_Besides the fact that he was who he was, he was also the Alpha, and he could not afford to get sentimental over a most likely dying dragon. Regardless of her species. No matter how unlikely it was that he would ever encounter

another of his kindâ€|

He sighed again. The beach was deserted except for himself, Hiccup and Astrid, who had moved down a ways to talk quietly and to give Toothless some space. The black dragon was grateful for this, perhaps more grateful than he should have been. The other dragons were either with Gobber and Valka or fishing for dinner. Casting all other thoughts aside, he simply began to speak to the unconscious Night Fury again in low, soothing tones. At least, he hoped they were low and soothing. He wasn't exactly the most loving or gentle of dragons. Only with Hiccup.

So, the mostly aloof, once playful and teasing Alpha began to tell the barely breathing form next to him about Berk. About his home. About the Vikings, in particular \_his \_human. About how he had first encountered Hiccup. Toothless gave a small laugh at that part, saying, "I really don't know why I didn't kill him." He told her of the war, of the battle with the Red Death, and some of his adventures with Hiccup in the last few years. His voice dropped to a whisper as he told her of the more recent events, specifically Hiccup's discovery of his mother, andâ€| the tragic death of Stoick. He thought of the massive monument to the great chief that overlooked the village, and oddly planned to take this dragon flying by it and to the ledge above it. It was a perfect getaway, hiding in plain sight.

\_Please. Wake up. \_The thought came unbidden to Toothless's mind and he trailed off, unsure of why he felt so vulnerable. He growled, unable to stop himself. Angry, he jumped to his feet and began circling her, sniffing her, refusing to acknowledge that her breathing was deeper and more steady. He stopped in front of her and stared at her face, willing her to open her eyes. He stayed there for a minute, two minutesâ€| he stared until his eyes hurt. Finally something unnameable welled up inside of him, and he began shouting at her.

"WHY CAN'T YOU JUST WAKE UP? DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING TO ME? I HAVEN'T SLEPT IN DAYS, I'VE NEGLECTED MY DUTIES, I HAVEN'T EATENâ€| ALL TO WATCH OVER YOUR DEAD BODY! I JUST DON'Tâ€| I just don't understandâ€|" his rant broke off even as Hiccup was shouting at him, telling him it was alright, telling him to calm down. Toothless felt a hand on his neck and sorrowfully, he wailed before dropping to the ground before covering his eyes.

Helplessly, Hiccup and Astrid watched this display of emotion. The Chief felt overwhelmingly sad, realizing how little time he had spent with Toothless lately, finally noticing how his dragon rarely joked around or played anymore. He was about to try to reassure the upset Night Fury when something moved in his peripheral vision. His head snapped to stare at the body of the female Fury. Nothing. Thenâ€|

She gave a soft moan, and shifted in her sleep.

The trio froze. Toothless slowly lifted his head from his paws, staring, willing her to move again. He quickly crawled closer, and hesitantly touched his nose to her face.

She let out a huff of air andâ€| her eyelids flickered. Toothless's eyes almost popped out of his head. Her eyesâ€| were they blue? Or

silver? Her eyelids flickered again, and her head shifted on the sand. Astrid gasped quietly.

Slowly, luminescent eyes opened, revealing incredible blue eyes. She stared straight at Toothless, as if she didn't believe he was real. She whispered, so quietly and hoarsely Toothless could barely hear her voice. "Areâ€¦ youâ€¦" she immediately broke off when she noticed the humans. Her pupils became slits and her eyes flashed to a silver color, and she appeared to try and back away, but her body betrayed her, and she lay on the sand, too weak to even struggle. Her breathing was ragged, and she looked confusedly between Toothless and the humans before her eyes rolled back into her head and she passed out.

Toothless, Hiccup, and Astrid were completely stunned. Only Toothless knew she had spoken, and his mind raced, wondering what she had been trying to say. One thing he did know, was that it was time to take her back to the village. He just couldn't let the other dragons of the island know about her existence. Easy, right?

\_Maybe I'll even get to know her name.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>But will she survive the journey back to the village? Will Toothless ever get to know her name? Perhaps. I might even need help choosing one for her... more details to come on that! You guys are awesome :)<strong>

## 6. Chapter 6

\*\*Colinou: Thanks for the review! I actually just wanted her eyes to be a different color than Toothless's, but just as mesmerizing. Plus, it might help some less observant vikings and dragons tell the two apartâ€¦ \*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Bleary eyes blinked, once, twice.<p>

For a moment, the surroundings shocked, and even stunned. \_Where in the worldâ€¦ \_There were strange walls surrounding her, perfectly vertical, and the top of the space was unlike anything she had ever seen. She was resting on a pile of something soft. A fire glowed on the ground in the middle of the space, quietly crackling. Looking around, she finally figured out where the exit was. A faint sliver of light shone through a long vertical crack in one of the walls.

But wait! Thereâ€¦ across the roomâ€¦ was thatâ€¦ a Night Fury? It was. A big one, on the other side of the fire.

\_Maybe I can sneak past himâ€¦ \_"oooooAAGH!" Searing pain shot through her side, and she collapsed back onto the ground. She closed her eyes, panting. Suddenly, she got the feeling thatâ€¦ yes, she was definitely being watched. She looked over to where the other Night Fury was laying, and saw enormous green eyes, clearly visible in the dim light. In fact, he wasn't even trying to hide the fact that he was staring at her.

"What?" she demanded, but it came out as a croak. Silently he- she was certain it was a he- stood, and walked slowly toward her. She began to silently panic. But he walked right past her. \_What? \_Her confusion was mounting. He reappeared next to her, pushing a bucket full of water towards her, so that she could reach it without having to move.

He sat on his haunches on the other side of the bucket and cocked his head, ears completely upright. "Thirsty?"

Suspicious, she sniffed the bucket. It smelled like perfectly clean water to her, but she still wasn't sure. "Really?" the other dragon asked. "After all the trouble I went to to save you, and you think I would poison you now?"

"Save?" she croaked again. For the first time she noticed that most of her body was bandaged, and her wings-

"Why can't I move my wing?" she cried, frantically trying to shift the appendage. "Where am I? Who are you?"

The larger Night Fury (who could barely understand her croaking) tried to calm her, but she was quickly passing concern and moving straight into a full on panic. "You need to- could you just- you're going to- STOP."

She froze, mid-thrash. That was the command of an Alpha.

Slowly, she looked back at him, eyes wide. "That's better," he said. "You're going to hurt yourself, and if you hurt yourself anymore I'm going to be quite unhappy. Now, drink." It wasn't an order, but she drank anyways, unsure of whether or not he was actually an Alpha. He looked awfully young not that he seemed weak, though. Then again, she was young, too. Wasn't she?

She hadn't realized how thirsty she actually was, and she drained the bucket quickly. She peered up shyly at him. He moved the bucket and came back, laying down in front of her. Not close enough to bother her, but it made her nervous all the same.

"Now, that's better. I'm Toothless," he introduced himself. "And you are?"

She tried to answer but found that she couldn't. In fact, she suddenly had a pounding headache.

Toothless noticed when her eyes squeezed shut, and became a little worried. "Don't you have a name?"

"Yes- no- I don't know-" she whispered miserably. "I can't remember."

This was a surprise to Toothless, but he didn't let it show. Instead he nodded and said reasonably, "Well, you were quite wounded when I found you," (he wasn't sure if he was ready to introduce the other dragons to her yet) "so, I suppose it makes sense that you might have some memory loss." He hid his disappointment. He really had wanted to know her name. \_Oh well.\_

"Do you remember anything else? Where you're from, how you ended up

in the middle of the ocean?" She shifted at his questions, squinting again. Her head throbbed with pain.

"I can't." To distract herself, she tried turning the tables. "Can I ask you questions, too?"

"Shoot."

"Why do they call you Toothless?"

He opened his mouth wide and retracted his teeth, giving her a gummy half-smile. She laughed, never really having seen the expression on a dragon before. More seriously, she thought for a moment. "I don't remember what happened, but I do remember hearing voices. And—" the thought struck her. "Humans! I remember humans. Maybe they shot me down," she added darkly. She paused when she saw a funny look pass over Toothless's face. "What?"

"I'll tell you soon, don't worry. Aren't you tired?"

She was, but she'd never admit it. Instead, she asked more questions. "What time is it? Why can't I move my wing? How long was I asleep? What do you mean, you \_found \_me? Where am I? Are you," she paused, unsure of how to ask this. "Are you an Alpha?"

A look of irritation crossed his face, which surprised her. It quickly passed, though, as if it had never happened. Toothless smiled again. "You sure do ask a lot of questions. For your information, it is the middle of the night. Your wing is broken in several places so there is a splint on it to keep the bones in aligned until they have healed. I wouldn't keep doing that," he said with a raised eyebrow as she tried shaking her wing in its splint. She stopped, looking sheepish. "Anyways," he continued. "You were asleep for about two weeks. You washed up on the beach, and you are no longer on the beach." She snorted, as if to say \_Thanks, Captain Obvious. \_

She was about to repeat her last question. \_Was he the Alpha? \_It seemed like pertinent information to her. But he was already talking about something else, so her curiosity would have to be put aside.

"You must be hungry." At his statement, her stomach growled loudly, and her ears went flat with embarrassment. But he only laughed, and got up. As Toothless walked into the corner to get her some fish, she took the opportunity to study him. \_What was he doing here? \_If he was in fact an Alpha, which she was still unsure of, did that mean there were other dragons around somewhere? Something caught her attention. His tailfin flashed \_red \_in the firelight—

"It's not polite to stare, you know," he called back to her without even turning around. Once again embarrassed, she retorted without thinking.

"That doesn't seem to stop you." Her eyes widened and she clamped her mouth shut. \_Idiot! What if he \_is \_the Alpha? You can't talk to the Alpha like that!\_

Instead of reprimanding her, he finally turned back to her, his mouth full of delicious-smelling fish. She couldn't help but notice his eyes. They were— well, they were beautiful. She had a feeling she

had seen eyes like that before, but never so vivid. And they twinkled- actually twinkled- with amusement.

Toothless came up close to her to place the fish within reach, close enough for her to really smell him. He smelled like the wind and the sea and an evergreen forest. All very different, but they had fused into some kind of pleasant aroma that followed him wherever he went. Blinking, she shook her head. What was she thinking, a \_pleasant aroma\_?

Instead of dwelling on the strange thought, she set about devouring the meal before her. She glanced up and saw Toothless lounging nearby, watching her eat. She slowed her ravenous inhalation of the fish and silently offered him some, although it pained her to do so.

She was relieved when he laughed and said "No, thank you."

Finally she finished eating, her belly completely full, and her eyelids began to droop. Yawning, she looked around again, finding Toothless standing nearby. "You should get some sleep," he said. Instead of protesting, she nodded slowly and rested her head on her front paws.

Toothless watched the strange Night Fury drift off to sleep, and wondered what exactly he had gotten himself into.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So, for reasons I shall not yet divulge, I need two names for the mysterious female Night Fury! These are a few I was considering.  
<strong>

**\*\*Stella\*\***

**\*\*Flash\*\***

**\*\*Shade\*\***

**\*\*Starlight\*\***

**\*\*(I'm trying not to use a name that someone else has used for this particular HTTYD OC. If anyone has other suggestions, I'm open to hearing them!)\*\***

## 7. Chapter 7 Pt 1

**\*\*Hi! I'm trying to update as quickly as I can before life gets crazy again and I won't have as much time to write. I wanted to thank a guest reviewer for their name suggestion. Super clever, I can't believe I didn't think of it before. You guys will see it soon enough :) Hope everything has been acceptable so far. Thanks for reading!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless spent the next week or so dodging the smaller female's questions about where they were and who he was. He simply insisted

that she eat and drink plenty of water, before disappearing for whole days at a time, to do gods knew what. But she was in no position to complain or follow him, and so she kept all of her suspicions to herself.<p>

At night, usually after a verbal sparring match with Toothless, she would dream of things she had never encountered, giant dragons and humans, a world where both could live in peace. When she awoke, she would watch Toothless sleep across from her, strange thoughts filling her mind. Where had these ideas come from? They were so vivid, surely they had to be real, and yet she was certain that she had never experienced them before, even without her memory.

Toothless, meanwhile, had slipped back into the stream that was the bustling village, and was addressing as many concerns as possible among the dragons, from territorial concerns to problems with the humans. One female dragon had waylaid him for almost an hour by running baby names past him. He had narrowly escaped this increasingly awkward conversation when Hiccup, who had noticed his dragon's discomfort, called the black dragon to his side. "Sorry," Toothless said as he backed away, anything but sorry. "Duty calls."

Yet images of the small, battered Night Fury laying at home in his shelter continually passed through his mind. He was distracted, sometimes running into things, and staring off into space. Their conversations in the evenings, even as he evaded her questions, were lively. She had quite a lively spirit for a dragon who had nearly died and lost their memory in the process. Toothless found himself smiling more at nothing in particular, which mystified the other dragons, but they would shrug, simply glad to see that their Alpha was pleased. None of them could ever dream in a thousand years why the Night Fury was really so, well, happy.

Toothless refused to consider what his friendship with the female could mean, or even become- he still suppressed hope and desire, although he couldn't help the tiny voice in the back of his head chanting, \_What if?\_

This voice became even harder to ignore when Valka, having observed the Night Fury while she slept, had mentioned conversationally, "She seems to be about your age, Toothless. How interesting."

Not willing to believe in things that were too good to be true, the Alpha simply shrugged and walked away, fighting to remind himself of reality. She had no name. She had no memory. She was a wild dragon, almost completely unaware that she was surrounded by a village full of Vikings and dragons. Hiccup had been building his new home higher up on the hill so that fewer villagers would pass by, and that's where Toothless stayed every night. So in reality she couldn't hear the bustle of the village below through the well insulated shelter, and even if she did hear something out of the ordinary, she wouldn't be able to inspect it, because she couldn't move. But the idea was still there. When she finally became aware of where she was, \_and who she was with,\_ the voice reminded him snidely, she would most likely want to leave.

And truth be told, Toothless didn't think he was ready to lose her.



\* \* \*

><p>It was early in the morning on the first day of the fourth week of her incapacitation, and the energetic female Night Fury was just about ready to lose her mind. She was no longer sleeping through the day and night. She would awake as soon as Toothless would quietly slip out the door at dawn, and stay awake, staring at the walls, blowing rings of smoke from her nose, counting the nails in the floorboards, even naming the dead fish and playing with them like little dolls, although she had no idea what dolls were.<p>

She was very certain that Toothless was hiding a great deal from her, and it didn't take a Night Fury's intelligence to figure that out. She just enjoyed his company so much, it distracted her from her attempts to pry out the truth. \_Ugh\_, she thought. \_This is getting out of hand.\_ She was afraid of what lay beyond the doors, even as her curiosity nearly killed her every time she heard a strange noise from outside. And she could swear she heard voices sometimes, but she was uncertain of who- or what- was responsible for them, if she wasn't imagining them completely. She figured it was most likely from her head injury, and was too confused to admit to Toothless that she thought she was actually going insane.

She'd had enough. She focused hard on her legs, and mustered all of her strength. Surprisingly, she made it to her feet. \_Good start.\_ Now for the walking. \_That's it, one step- \_"Oof!" she fell flat on her face. Grumbling, she began to rise again, when the door creaked open.

Freezing, she let her weight settle onto the ground again, as though she had never attempted to escape. \_Well, escape was a strong word. Perhapsâ€¦ to make sure she still had legs and not just sticks hanging off the side of her body? \_Yes, that's what she had been doing.

\_Oh. \_It was just Toothless. \_When had he become "just" Toothless? \_He slipped in silently, cocking his head in a silent question at the haphazard arrangement of fish on the floor and the small scorch marks dotting the wall opposite of where she had been laying.

"Umâ€¦" she started, as Toothless cleared his throat nervously.

"Why are you back so soon?" she asked quickly.

"Wellâ€¦" he shifted his weight from one side to the other. "Do you trust me?" The question surprised her, and she had to think for a moment.

Slowly, she responded. "I think I trust you, as much as I can trust a dragon who doesn't trust me." It was Toothless's turn to look surprised.

"Why do you think I don't trust you?"

"Well," she started. "You evade my questions. I have no idea who you are. You don't tell me anything about what you do every day while I lay here losing my mind. In fact, you don't tell me anything at all."

The larger Night Fury had the grace to look a little ashamed. But she

wasn't finished.

"I might be young but that doesn't make me stupid," she said. "In fact, you're probably not even that much older than me. But I trust that you won't harm me. I trust you to keep me safe." She finished with a small imitation of Toothless's smile, and he couldn't help but return it. They remained that way for a moment, gazing into each other's eyes. Then Toothless seemed to hear something she didn't, because he looked towards the door, then back at her.

"I think," he said, "it's time for me to give you some answers."

## 8. Chapter 7 Pt 2

Hours later, Toothless finished his story. He told her of the old war. He told her about the humans, and the destruction he had been forced to wreak on them under the control of the Red Death. He told her of the humans' attempts to retaliate, the dragons who had died in the attacks. He told her of Hiccup, how the boy had shot him down, only to free him. Instead of killing him, Toothless had basically only screeched in the human's face before taking off, his torn off tailfin causing him to smash into trees and boulders before he ended up in the cove. "I'll show it to you; it's my favorite place on the island."

\_So I wasn't dreaming of nothing, \_she thought as he told her of the battle against the Red Death, then of the peace between dragons and humans. He said simply, "It's been that way ever since."

She felt like he was definitely leaving things out, but was too stunned to try and force it out of him. "So how do you fly now?"

Toothless lifted his tail and suspended the tip of it in the air between them. She saw clearly the red prosthetic he had been so careful to hide from her in the dim light of the shelter, and she couldn't help but be in awe of how realistic it was. This human, Hiccup, obviously cared greatly for Toothless, otherwise he never would have bothered to create this for him.

"I could only fly with Hiccup for a while, but then he designed me a tail that allows me to fly on my own. It definitely comes in handy, although nothing compares to flying with him the way we first learned how."

\_Wow. \_"I feel like I've heard these stories before, but I know I wasn't there I've been dreaming of giant dragons and evil, monstrous men and this peace you speak of between the dragons and humans."

Toothless looked sheepish. "Well, while you were unconscious on the beach, I sort of talked to you. The entire time. I told you all of my stories, so maybe those are what you've been dreaming of."

\_Another wow. Did Toothless care? \_"If I was on the beach, how did I end up here?" For the first time she questioned the origins of her wing splint. Dragons were clever, but weren't exactly known for their claw dexterity.

"I haven't been entirely truthful with you," Toothless admitted.

"No way," she interrupted sarcastically.

He laughed, before continuing. "I'm not actually the one who found you. Another group of dragons, the other few who were trained right after me, found you, and brought me to you. From there, we carried the humans over to help care for you."

"I see," she said. It made a lot more sense. Well, everything made sense now. The strange structure she was in, the voices, the never-ending supply of fish, Toothless's disappearances, the wing splint and bandages.

"Well, what's happened since you defeated the Red Death? You speak of it so casually, I can't help but think that greater things have happened in recent years," she said slyly, trying to figure him out. For all he had told her, she still felt like she had no idea who he was.

As Toothless tried to figure out a way to not answer that question, a familiar voice called from outside. "Toothless? Bud, you in there? Can we come in?"

Toothless purred loudly, a sound which caught the suddenly alert female off guard. "What kind of noise was that?" She didn't get an answer as the door opened slightly and two figures stepped in from the bright light outside. One was a male, with shaggy auburn hair, and the other was a slightly taller female, her dark hair tied back.

They both smiled at her, which confused her. Despite all of Toothless's stories, she wasn't quite ready to trust the Vikings. The woman looked at the male and whispered something in his ear before stepping off to the side, watching the scene avidly. The man stepped forward, gradually raising his hand. "Hi there," he crooned. "My name is Hiccup. Perhaps Toothless has mentioned me?"

\_So this was the famous Hiccup. \_She had thought he might be, well, taller.

Hiccup continued to walk towards her, slowly but steadily, never breaking eye contact. "Whatâ€¦ is he doing?" she asked Toothless nervously.

"He's going to try to bond with you."

She protested immediately, and Hiccup paused, looking back and forth between her and Toothless. The bigger black dragon quickly growled at her, which silenced her quite quickly.

"Look," he said to her. "These are probably the most trustworthy humans in the world. If you are going to start somewhere, which \_you must\_, " Toothless emphasized, "you should begin with them. They saved your life, perhaps you could at least give them a chance?"

She swallowed and turned back to Hiccup, who had somehow crossed the distance between them and was smiling encouragingly at her. "You sure are beautiful," the human said. Well, she could get used to that. So

when he reached out his hand again, she soundlessly placed her nose to his palm, and without warning a soft purr rumbled in her chest. The female dragon looked slightly alarmed, and Toothless laughed at her. "It's \_that \_kind of noise."

Then Valka, the other human, approached, and began to scratch under the female Night Fury's chin. The dragon moaned with delight and rolled over, careful not to crush her wing. "They are so alike, Hiccup!" Valka exclaimed. "I wonder if all Night Furies are so much fun."

\_They? Alike? Her, and Toothless? Not possible. He was too aloof, too mysterious. \_That line of thought ceased as Hiccup pulled out a bunch of what could only be described as green perfection and rubbed it against her nose. "Good ol' dragon nip," he grinned.

Meanwhile, Toothless heard from beyond the shelter the sound of smashing wood and the shrieks of angry dragons. \_What on earth- \_he quickly slipped out of the room, careful not to disturb the bonding session taking place.

Below, he could see a cloud of Terrible Terrors swooping low over the marketplace, terrorizing the humans running randomly around the square. Larger dragons, Nadders and Nightmares, were arguing loudly, and their humans had gathered and were shouting at each other as well.

His jaw dropped. \_I was only gone for a few hours! \_A large shadow appeared next to him before Cloudjumper landed next to him, surveying the scene with just a little distaste.

"What happened?!" asked Toothless.

"Well, I overheard some of the dragons yelling about Terrors framing them for stealing human food, and then the humans blamed each other's dragons, then-" the large dragon gestured at the scene with his wing, "\_this.\_"

The pair watched for a moment more before they reached a silent agreement, and they both flew down the hill towards the mayhem. Cloudjumper veered off to the side to break up the arguing Nadders, while Toothless shot a plasma blast at the cloud of Terrors, scattering them in different directions. The Alpha landed in the square amidst the crowd of frantic Vikings and wondered why Gobber wasn't there, taking charge of the situation. \_That's right, he was off on the other side of the island with Grump collecting ingredients. \_

The humans were largely ignoring the Night Fury in their midst as they scrambled to collect the goods they had thrown into the air in fright and find cover at the same time, so he rolled his eyes before running over to where Cloudjumper was now trying to calm a group of angry Nightmares and their riders.

Cloudjumper, if it was even possible, suddenly paled. Toothless heard more shouts and roars behind him, and he turned to see what the commotion was. "What is it now?"

The doors to the shelter were wide open, and he saw Hiccup and his mother holding up their hands to stop the mayhem that was rampaging

up the hill. Right in the center of the chaos, standing frozen with shock, was a very frightened looking female Night Fury.

## 9. Chapter 8

Her bandaged wing was held above her back, and the scars from the lightning and whatever had attacked her stood out visibly, fresh on her hide. The bright sunlight blinded her, but she could see the outlines of many buildings and the ocean beyond.

This had been a mistake. The crowd of humans and dragons surged in, shouting, roaring and pointing at her. Hiccup and Valka stood between them and her, trying desperately to protect her and get her back inside. But she was frozen with fear and shock, and just when it seemed that she would be consumed by the din, a great roar sounded, louder than anything else. Everyone immediately silenced, as a black blur flew in between her and the village people and dragons.

"Enough!" A blinding flash erupted in the air.

Toothless was livid. Wings and tail raised, he sunk low into a predatory stance, whipping his tail back and forth. The dragons' jaws had all dropped, and the humans appeared to have no problem understanding him.

"Get out of here!" The Alpha commanded, his pupils threatening slits, sending all of the dragons scurrying. Well, all but five, who stood looking at him with no small amount of fear. The humans, in the mean time, had all turned to their Chief, who was speaking to them with his hands raised.

She caught snatches of his speech. "Washed up on shoreâ€¦ woundedâ€¦ wild dragonâ€¦ leave her alone."

Toothless had turned towards her, ignoring the few remaining dragons, and his expression made her shrink away with dread. "Get inside," he growled.

\_Soâ€¦ maybe he was the Alpha after all. \_She gulped and did as he said, slowly stumbling on her weak legs back into the safety of the shelter before collapsing in the corner.

Great. Now she'd actually have to take him seriously.

\* \* \*

><p>Stormfly and the others slowly climbed the hill to where Toothless had just sent the female Fury back into the shelter. The blue dragon had never seen Toothless get so angry. Hookfang was reminded of when he had been about to kill Hiccup in the arena. Toothless had reacted very similarly just now. The Alpha had not allowed any of their small group to visit or even see the injured Night Fury female, and it led them all to wonder why.<p>

"Toothless?" Meatlug hesitantly called his name.

"WHAT?" he roared, turning around quickly but stopping abruptly when

he saw that it was just Meatlug and the others. "I'm sorry," he apologized, his ears drooping. "I knew the reaction would be big, but I had no idea it would be like \_that.\_" \_What had she been thinking? \_Toothless wondered angrily. \_That could have ended very badly, and as it was he had scared his dragons half to death defending her! \_The little voice in the back of his mind spoke up, though.\_ Why rush to defend her? It's not like she means anything to youâ€¦| \_

\_UGH. \_ Toothless promised his loyal friends that he would see them later, effectively sending them off as the last of the most curious Vikings was ushered away by Astrid, who had appeared in the middle of the fray to support Hiccup. The black dragon met his human's eyes, and they both sighed. "Well bud, that could have gone better." The Viking paused, then corrected himself. "Then again, it could have been much worse."

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless allowed himself to deflate a bit before scratching on the entrance of his shelter to announce his presence. After a moment, he pushed open the door and slipped into the dimly lit space. He spotted her curled up in the corner, her good wing draped over her head.<p>

A floorboard creaked beneath him as he moved towards her, and her wing lifted just enough to reveal a bright, silvery eye. Toothless just sat down and didn't speak. After a moment she uncurled and began to apologize profusely.

"I'm so sorry, I had no idea that would happen. I just wanted to go outsideâ€¦| it's so dark in here and I feel like I'm losing my mindâ€¦| this wouldn't have happened if you had let me out sooner!â€¦| you never told me there were so many humans, and dragons, and they were all coming straight for meâ€¦| " She was shaking.

Toothless simply walked over and lay down next to her, pressing his side into hers. Uncertain, she lowered her head onto her paws and didn't look at him.

"Are you okay?" He asked quietly.

She whimpered in response and peeked up at him, to see him attempting to give her a gummy smile. Not able to resist, she shyly smiled back, and managed not to jump when she felt his tail curl around hers. Quickly she looked back at the floor, not sure of how to act. \_Does Toothlessâ€¦| care?\_

Toothless couldn't believe what he was doing. The rush of power from being the Alpha had given him an inflated sense of confidence. \_So what do I do? I waltz in and make advances toward a frightened, injured dragon. She can't even get up and leave if she wants to!\_

His darkening thoughts were interrupted by a soft voice.  
"Toothless?"

He was slow to reply. "Yes?"

A beat. "Are you the Alpha?"

Another beat. "Does it matter?"

They fell asleep like that, his larger body curved around her smaller form, giving her comfort. She would not remember her dreams, but they were warm and filled to the brim with emotion. Her eyes opened blue the next morning, and she yawned happily, before turning to wish him a good morning.

But he was already gone.

## 10. Chapter 9

\*\*Hi! This is a long one, so thanks for being patient with me! \*\*

\* \* \*

><p>An explosion in the forest sent a flock of birds cartwheeling through the sky and numerous small animals fled, scurrying through the underbrush to find protection.<p>

Toothless was running, blasting random trees and rocks as he passed. His legs were a blur as he traversed the forest on Berk. He didn't want to speak to anyone, or be diplomatic, or take charge, or solve other dragons' problems. \_I have enough problems of my own.\_

He ended up at the cove, barely panting from the exertion of sprinting all that way. Flexing his shoulders, he took a moment to revel in the thrill of being a powerful Night Fury. Not the Alpha, just a strong, tough dragon. Then again, wasn't that how he had ended up as the Alpha? He was quite persistent, he'd give himself that. \_There's that Night Fury pride.\_

He laid down next to the water's edge, and peered at his reflection in the water. Trailing a single claw across the surface, he distorted the image, until he could no longer tell what he was looking at. That's how he felt, as if he had lost sight of himself. Didn't he love to have fun, didn't he like to spend time with his friends? Hadn't he bridged the gap, along with Hiccup, between dragons and humans? Speaking of accomplishments, hadn't he also defeated the Red Death \_and \_the evil Bewilderbeast?

He could handle one little Night Fury. Right?

\* \* \*

><p>She sat alone in the shelter, pondering the events of the day. It had been a few days since she had woken up alone, and she hadn't seen Toothless since. <em>I refuse to worry. <em>She \_had \_seen another dragon, a friend of Toothless who didn't seem to be as scared of him as the other dragons.

Meatlug, a female Gronkle, had come by, peeking in and whispering a quick "Hello?" The female Fury would soon learn that this boldness was unusual for the normally quiet, sweet rock-eater. They had quickly struck up a conversation, the Night Fury starving for attention and the curious Gronkle, who soon learned that the nameless black dragon could remember nothing of her life before she had washed up on Berk. Meatlug, on the other paw, was a veritable fount of information. She told the Fury all kinds of stories about the village

and its inhabitants, the Dragon Academy, and the talking a bit about her human, Fishlegs. \_Fish don't have legsâ€¦ do they? \_she wondered.

But the stories that interested her the most were those about Toothless. Meatlug seemed to have an endless supply of flattering things to say about the Alpha, ranging from his bravery and prowess in battle to his hidden fun side.

This kind of information gave the Fury food for thought, enough to last for hours after Meatlug had left. Soâ€¦ he had challenged and actually defeated a \_Bewilderbeast\_? To become Alpha? Weren't they the largest and most dominant of all the dragons? \_How had Toothless done it?\_

When the Gronkle wasn't visiting the black dragon practiced walking, circling the room faster and faster until she was running. She practiced leaping over the fish barrels, stopping every once and a while to grab a few to eat.

Finally came the day when Hiccup and the human Gobber walked in to check her wing beneath its splint. She sat completely still, trying hard not to quiver with excitement. She felt as they removed the boards and bandages and slowly, sloooooowly stretched out her wing to its full span. She flexed it experimentally, and felt no pain. A huge smile on her face, she jumped around the two men excitedly, purring loudly and licking their faces.

Hiccup laughed at her antics. "I don't know where Toothless has gotten off to, but I think it's time for you to meet the rest of the gang."

\* \* \*

><p>Stormfly, Barf and Belch, Meatlug, and Hookfang were gathered in the old arena. For once it was deserted, not full of hatchlings and small humans attempting to bond and learn to function together. They lounged around in the sun, lazily commenting on the recent events involving a certain black dragon.<p>

"I never got a good look at her," said Stormfly.

"Neither did I, but judging from Toothless's behavior I think I would find the experience quiteâ€¦ enjoyable." Hookfang lazily responded. "I bet she's something else."

Stormfly was not pleased with this assessment. This new Night Fury had definitely put a kink in her plan to win Toothless over. Well, she would just have to redouble her efforts to make herself the best choice, the \_obvious \_choice.

Meatlug kept quiet. She didn't want the others knowing that she had been visiting the nameless Fury.

"What's her-" began Belch.

"name again?" finished Barf.

"I don't think I have one," said a new voice from the entrance of the arena.



All four dragons perked up at the Fury's arrival. "Well, speak of the devil," Hookfang drawled.

To Stormfly, \_devil \_was certainly an apt description. The black female looked like Toothless but smaller and slimmer, not to mention her luminous blue (or were they silver?) eyes. Grudgingly, the blue dragon had to acknowledge that the newcomer was very attractive, just as Hookfang came to the same conclusion.

"Well, we will just have to come up with one for you, then, won't we?" Hookfang smiled charmingly at her, moving in to stand next to her. "I'm Hookfang, by the way."

"Um-" she started as she moved further into the arena, but was interrupted by Meatlug.

"What a great idea! You have to have a name."

"How else are we supposed to talk about you behind your back?" finished Hookfang with a wink.

"How aboutâ€¦| Star?"

The Night Fury shook her head. "Too feminine. But wait, I have yet to hear \_your \_names," she said, with a sly wink at Meatlug, who had already told her all about the other dragons. Meatlug smiled slightly. That wink definitely reminded her of another Night Fury she knewâ€¦|

"I'm Hookfang, as I have mentioned," the Monstrous Nightmare declared. "The Zippleback arguing with itself is Barf and Belch, Meatlug is the Gronkle, and the lovely Nadder over there is our Stormfly."

The female Night Fury feigned shock at this information. "So \_you're \_the dragons I've heard so much about. How you trained those human teens to ride you, and then defeated the Red Deathâ€¦| that's amazing!" She figured flattery might just get her somewhere. "And Stormfly! Your rider is Hiccup's mate? Astrid is so strong and beautiful, I can see a definite resemblance between the two of you!" Stormfly couldn't help but preen. This impressionable young Night Fury was no match for her quick wit and external beauty. But that didn't stop her from giving the newcomer a an dismissive once-over, eyes drifting over the fresh scars on her hide, as though judging the Fury's worth, and finding her lacking.

The small Night Fury resisted the urge to stick her tongue out at the blue dragon, and instead gazed back with equal intensity, standing proudly. She knew, even without her memory, even with her flawed and scarred appearance, that she was more than a match for the Nadder, although she couldn't help but wonder why Stormfly was treating her like she didn't like her. They had never even met before!

Toothless watched the scene unfold from the shadows of the entrance. No one had noticed his presence. He was exhausted from his rampage through the forest. Not sleeping or eating for several days, he had only just returned to the village to reassure Hiccup that he hadn't vanished permanently.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey bud!" his rider had exclaimed when he saw the weary Night Fury. "I was starting to worry." Toothless gave him a tired but genuine smile and began to walk up the hill towards the shelter. He needed to talk to the female. Set some boundaries. <em>She was a danger to his self-control. <em>

Hiccup interrupted his troubled thoughts. "Hey, Toothless? She's not in there." \_What? Had she left already? \_The dragon's heart sank, and he didn't even try to suppress the feeling.

"She's in the arena with the other dragons." Toothless perked up immediately, feeling energized. He bounded over to Hiccup, giving the human a big lick across the side of his face, before spreading his wings and leaping skyward, flying off in the direction of the arena. Behind him, he could hear Hiccup's cries of mock disgust. "You know that doesn't wash out!"

\* \* \*

><p>So here he was, crouched in the shadows like he wasn't supposed to be there. Toothless was mildly surprised at the female Fury's behavior. <em>Flattery? <em>Then he noticed the stare-down between her and Stormfly. \_Interesting. \_He didn't like the look on the blue dragon's face. But he was pleased with the smaller dragon's response, although he would never admit it. \_That's Night Fury pride\_. He smiled slightly.

\* \* \*

><p>"I have it!" shouted Barf.<p>

"\_Night!\_" he and Belch announced at the same time.

"Too original," the newcomer commented, deadpan.

"Fury?"

"What about \_Mid\_night?"

The ideas kept flying in until Meatlug interrupted. "How aboutâ€| Lightning?" she suggested shyly.

Immediately all eyes swiveled towards the black dragon in their midst.

"Lightningâ€|" she mused, thinking of the unique scar on her back from the storm's fury. "I like it."

The others cheered, but were cut off by another voice, just arriving on the scene.

"Lightning."

She froze and turned to see Toothless enter the arena. "It's fitting," he called out for all the dragons to hear. He then came up close beside her and said, just to her, "I like it." Neither of them noticed Stormfly's glare.

Lightning tried to ignore the shiver that passed through her at the sound of his voice. \_Since when is that an acceptable reaction to a dragon's voice?\_ The larger black dragon passed her without looking back, and she steeled herself. If he could do it, so could she.

"Hookfang," she smiled sweetly at the Nightmare, who immediately hurried over. "What was \_your \_name before you bonded with your human?"

"Actually, I don't know," he answered, looking a little put out.

"Really?" Lightning turned to Meatlug. "What about you?"

Meatlug looked like she was about to answer when Toothless interrupted. "Serving the Red Death eliminated our individual identities. None of us can remember who we were before then. Not I, as no more than a weapon of mass destruction. Not these dragons, captured from their service to the Queen and forced to live in this very ring, unwillingly teaching Viking youths how to slay other dragons.

"Speaking of Viking youths, your riders are on their way over here." Toothless finished. The other dragons groaned, but in reality couldn't be more pleased. Each of them was certain that their human was the best human, although they all harbored a soft spot for Hiccup, who had been the first to throw down his weapon and extend his hand in peace.

Lightning was left pondering what Toothless had said. \_I'm not the only one who has lost their identity.\_ The Alpha now only knew of his life with Hiccup, and to her, it was starting to seem like it wasn't such a bad life, after all.

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup walked into the arena, followed by his friends (and future wife. The thought still gave him butterflies in his stomach.) Now that they were adults, one might think that they had grown up a bit, but they were still just as stubborn and reckless as they had been when they were fifteen.<p>

The Chief looked over the assembled dragons as they communicated with each other. A few years ago he had begun to believe that the reptiles had their own language, and he had evidence to support it. Now was a good time to test it.

Without being summoned Toothless left the dragons and bounded over to his rider, nudging him with his nose. "Hey, Toothless." The other dragons split up and went to their respective humans, begging for attention and the possibility of treats.

Lightning hung back, but when Hiccup moved away from Toothless and beckoned her over with his hands and a grin, she couldn't stay away. As she approached she compared him to the other humans. As it turned out, Hiccup was taller than the rest of them, although none of them could compare to the hulking Vikings wandering around the village.

As Hiccup rubbed her under her chin, the other youths seemed to notice her for the first time, and gathered around her, talking animatedly. One in particular, the largest of the humans in the arena, pointed excitedly at her face and said something about the color of her eyes to Hiccup. \_That must be Fishlegs.\_ She peered at the stubby legs peeking out from underneath his fur tunic, but as far as she could tell they were not actually fish. \_Disappointing.\_

"What's her name?" asked Astrid, standing at Hiccup's shoulder.

"I haven't figured one out yet," Hiccup admitted.

"Oh! We could name her!" shouted Tuffnut.

"I like Star!"

Lightning snorted. This was going to go exactly how the dragons' conversation had.

"No, no!" said Hiccup.

Ruffnut stepped closer. "How about \_Bloody Death!\_"

"Um, no?" Hiccup didn't seem surprised by the suggestion.

Tuffnut pondered for a moment. "I've got it! \_Furious Bloody Night Death!\_"

"Again, not feeling it," Hiccup said, as Astrid snorted in amusement next to him.

Snotlout grinned. "Hookfury! Nightfang!"

Lightning couldn't believe the absolute idiocy of the suggestions. Apparently, neither could Hiccup. The Chief turned towards her and asked, "Do you already have a name, girl?"

Before she could nod her head, Tuffnut laughed. "Dragons don't talk, Hiccup. Why would she have a name?" At this Hiccup frowned, and Toothless finally stepped in, pushing the twins out of the way. With his wing he lightly brushed the strange scar on her back, basically spelling it out for his rider. Hiccup frowned, then his face broke out into a smile.

"I've got it." He announced. "Lightning."

"I love it," said Astrid.

"Yeah, whatever," said Tuffnut. Turning towards his twin, he said, "I personally would have chosen Butt-Elf, but to each their own."

Ruffnut snickered before punching him in the face. Tuff stumbled and tripped into Snotlout, knocking him over. Jumping to his feet, he swung at the male Thorston but ended up hitting Fishlegs in the stomach. A few years ago this might have sent the sensitive young man running away in tears, but now that he was significantly larger than Snotlout, he only shouted and raised his fists threateningly. Snotlout paled and backed up quickly, running into Ruffnut, who put

him in a chokeholdâ€|

Hiccup, Astrid, Toothless, and Lightning watched in total astonishment as the riders and then their dragons began to fight like, well, children and hatchlings, respectively. The Chief supposed that they had been behaving well for long enough that they deserved a little fistfight, and turned to whisper in Astrid's ear, who nodded, then turned bright red.

"Really?" she asked Hiccup.

"Really, babe."

Excitedly, she leaned in and kissed her future husband, planning on holding him to his promise. Still blushing, she raised her axe and started shouting at the brawling humans and dragons. "Alright, you half-trolls, clear out!" chasing them out of the arena and leaving Hiccup with the two Night Furies. Toothless looked endlessly entertained, while Lightning couldn't decide if it was funny or horrifying how quickly the situation had deteriorated.

"Well, now that we are aloneâ€|" Hiccup addressed Lightning. "Do you think you're ready to fly yet?"

The female Night Fury looked nervously at her wing.

"Don't worry, we'll take it slow." Off in the distance, shouts could be heard. "The Chief! Where is the Chief!"

Hiccup looked dismayed. "Well, I guess I won't be able to help you out today, Lightning." She tried to hide her disappointment, but the human noticed it immediately.

"Hmmâ€|" he wondered aloud, before his face lit up. "I've got it! Toothless will help you! He's got his independent tailfin on. You don't need me, right bud?" She turned, hopeful, only to see an expression akin to nausea on the other Night Fury's face. \_So that's how it was going to be.\_ Lightning turned away, suppressing the hurt in her chest. She hadn't been sure Toothless was avoiding her, but now she was sure. \_What did I do wrong?\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So things are certainly getting more complicated. A jealous Stormfly, an indifferent Toothlessâ€| Poor Lightning is definitely confused. (I would be, too!) <strong>

\*\*Please let me know if you like it, or have any ideas on how to make it better! You're awesome!\*\*

## 11. Chapter 10

Toothless was not excited as he led Lightning to the cliffs. He absolutely refused to feel anything at all.

Lightning walked behind him in silence, her ears drooping and her tail dragging on the ground. She avoided looking at the other dragon walking in front of her, oddly disappointed for someone who had decided not to like the bigger Fury. She wouldn't think of how her

heart had lifted when she had seen him enter the arena. She wouldn't think of how he didn't react at all when she flirted with Hookfang. She wouldn't think of his green eyes, or his stupid smile, or—  
\_Stop right there. This is going too far. You don't know who you are and you don't know how you got here. What interest would he have in you? He probably can't wait for you to get your strength back so he can kick you off his island— \_

In front of her, Toothless was still struggling with his thoughts as well. He wouldn't think of her surprising resilience in the face of all that had happened to her. He wouldn't think of her bright, curious eyes. And he definitely wouldn't think about how much he wanted to blast Hookfang in the face when she had smiled at the arrogant Nightmare—  
\_Possessive, much? \_The little voice in the back of his head remarked. Toothless involuntarily growled, startling Lightning behind him.

\_Did he just growl at me? \_Right as she was about to ask, he stopped walking and cut her off.

"We're here."

Lightning moved around his unmoving form and took in the view. The sun was high in the cloudless blue sky, and the ocean stretched on forever, interrupted by nearby tree-dotted sea stacks. Gulls flew high in the sky and she became re-energized, ready to soar up there with them.

She peered over the edge and immediately became nervous. They were awfully high up; it would be a long fall to the ocean below. "Um—  
are you sure we should be doing this here?"

Toothless watched her as she looked out at the sea with wonder, and he saw when her nerves kicked in. \_No, I'm not sure.\_ "Yes, I'm sure. You'll be fine." With that, he spread his wings and launched himself off the cliff, spiraling upwards into the sky before diving down, flapping his wings to stay level with the cliff's edge.

Meeting his gaze, Lightning hesitated. He looked so strong as he flew, and she felt so weak. She looked at the ground between her paws, trying to decide whether or not to take the leap.

"You can do it— I won't let you fall." Toothless's voice was unusually soft, and she looked back up, to see him gazing at her evenly, his face betraying none of his thoughts or emotions. When she didn't respond he landed, moving around to stand behind her. She crept up closer to the edge, once again looking at the waves crashing up against the rocks at the bottom.

"I don't—" She barely said two words before something shoved her, hard, and she toppled over the edge. "Whooooooooaaaaa!"

As she fell she righted herself, trying not to panic. \_What do I do what do I do what do I— \_Right as she was about to crash onto the rocks, she spread her wings wide and the wind caught her, sending her soaring over the water. She looked behind her in amazement to see Toothless right at her tail, and he was— laughing! \_How dare he?\_

"YOU ALMOST KILLED ME!"

"You don't look dead to me," he said teasingly, and her racing heart seemed to fill up her chest.

"Maybe not, but you will be soon!"

"What's that supposed to-" Toothless barely had time to duck before she shot a plasma blast back at him. "Hey!"

She laughed out loud, and flew higher, increasing her speed. Toothless chased her through the sky, both of them firing small blasts in each other's direction without actually hitting them. They lazily dodged the sea stacks, barely moving as they changed directions.

Lightning flew toward a puffy white cloud, and disappeared into it. \_Maybe he won't find me and I can sneak up on himâ€¦\_ She emerged from the other side and looked around. \_Maybe he didn't-\_

"BOO!"

She screeched and dropped a few feet. Above her was Toothless, cracking up. "You jerk!"

Seeing the expression on her face, Toothless immediately shut up and fled, but she was close behind him. \_Time to show her what real speed is.\_ He raised his wings and brought them down, hard, creating a sonic boom as he exploded forward.

Lightning was shocked. She was pretty sure she had never seen any dragon do that before. "Hey, wait up!" In the distance, she saw the other dragon blast into a larger cloud formation, and she flew harder, determined to catch him in it. Finally she entered the white space and slowed, listening carefully. From out of nowhere a strange noise sounded, and she felt something travel over her. \_What was that?\_ She dove down to get out of the cloud. As she slipped from the cloud, flying straight down, she thought she was staring at a larger reflection of herself, until two vivid green eyes appeared and she realized that it was Toothless, flying identically across from her.

They were close enough to touch; how had she not noticed him in the cloud? \_How did he find me so easily?\_

Toothless looked at Lightning as they dove from the sky. He knew he was dangerously close, that if they collided they could both die. But he was confident in his flying skills, he and Hiccup did this all the time.

\_She was beautiful.\_ The thought came out of nowhere as his green eyes met her blue ones. Tiny beads of moisture from the cloud slipped off of their hides as they hurtled towards the blue sea. She must have been thinking along the same lines because she shyly broke their eye contact, instead staring straight down.

Somewhat disappointed by this, Toothless decided it was time to break out of the fall. They were approaching land, and it would be unfortunate if either of them happened to hit it. "Alright," he said, somewhat roughly. "Time to take it down a notch."

He pulled away from her and spread his wings wide to slow his descent, and Lightning went to do the same. But something was wrong, only one of her wings was opening- \_the other must have become too weary. \_Fear rose in Toothless's throat. \_This was all his fault.

—

Lightning spun uncontrollably, the wind buffeting her one functioning wing. \_She was going to die. \_"Lightning!" she heard her name called, and she did her best to turn on her back so she could look skyward. Toothless had pulled his wings close to his body and was diving to catch up to her, his face determined. "Close your wings!" he ordered her. Terrified, she pulled them close to her back as Toothless came even with her. "Turn sideways!" \_What? "Now!" \_

She did as he said and he came so close he was almost touching her. He held his legs out and shouted, "Grab hold of me!" Quickly she intertwined her legs with his until they were one object, tearing through the wind. "Hold on," he said, and slowly opened his wings. Lightning fearfully buried her face in his neck, shutting her eyes tightly.

With a loud \_whoosh \_the wind caught under Toothless's wings, straining them as they stretched to slow their uncontrolled fall. They clung to each other, Toothless once again praying to the gods that his wings would hold up against the pressure. Lightning turned her head to peek behind her and saw rapidly approaching land. \_They were both going to die. Unless...\_

Toothless desperately tried to flap his wings, once, twice— gradually, they slowed to the point where he was influencing the speed of their descent. The thought strayed through his mind- \_they fit together perfectly. \_He aimed at the forest, hoping that the trees would break their fall. Until he felt his grip on her loosening, why was-

"I'm sorry, Toothless!"

\_She was letting go. \_

The trees were getting closer and closer. But if she fell now she could die, or be seriously hurt. \_No. \_

She was almost completely out of his grasp when he shifted, caught her, and wrapped his wings tightly around her. She blinked at the sudden darkness. \_ What— \_was her last thought before they crashed into the forest.

## 12. Chapter 11 ish

\*\*Sorry for the cliffhanger! Hope this helps— \*\*

\*\*(insert heart here)\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Stormfly watched as the two Night Furies hurtled from the sky. Something wasn't right, but she couldn't tell from this distance. When the black dragons flew below the tree line the Nadder turned,



hurt. Toothless never flew that close to any other dragon. <em>What does it mean? <em>Stormfly refused to consider the possibility.

Taking off, the blue dragon headed back to the village. Well, good for \_Lightning.\_ Looking behind her, she saw no sign of the Furies, and was too frustrated to consider that something might actually have gone wrong during the little female's test flight.

She would tell no one of what she had seen.

\* \* \*

><p>She woke in the dark. Her eyes opened, but she couldn't see anything.<p>

"Ughâ€|" \_What happened? \_She tried to move but her body was trapped, pinned by something warm.

Suddenly it all came back to her. The flight, the fall, Toothless holding her closeâ€|" \_Toothless!\_

Lightning gasped and tried to stand, pushing through the barrier that held her down. It was the middle of the night. The light of the moon filtered through the branches above her, faintly lighting her surroundings. Looking around, she saw no movement, no sign of him anywhere.

"Toothless?" she called out softly. No response. \_Where could he have gone? \_She went to walk and fell forward, tripping on some-body.

Toothless was on his back beneath her, not moving. The side of his head was slick with dark... \_blood\_, and she realized with horror that it was all over her, too. His hide was scraped all over, and fresh blood seeped from the wounds.

His eyes were closed and Lightning realized, her fear building, that she couldn't hear him breathing. \_Oh, noâ€|" \_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Whoops! Another cliffhanger for ya. Cheers, lovely people!<strong>

## 13. Chapter 12

\*\*Sorry for that last bit. (Not really, heh.) It won't happen again, probably. \*\*

\*\*I need a cover picture! Anyone with any ideas, please let me know! :) \*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"Toothless!" Lightning shouted. No response. Fearing the worst, she pressed her ear against his chest, searching for some sign of life. <em>Why had he done this? <em>If he was dead, because of her-if the other dragons didn't kill her first- well, she wouldn't be

able to stand it. She couldn't lose him.

At first, she didn't hear anything. Then, faintlyâ€|

One beat.

Another.

"Oh," she whispered. Not one to attempt communication with deities, she still felt it necessary to show her gratitude to one of the ones she was familiar with. "Oh, thank Thor." (Even though it was likely Thor's handiwork that had landed her here in the first place.)

But the larger black dragon wasn't breathing. If he didn't get air soon, that beat might stopâ€|

Panic welled again. "Toothless! You have to wake up, please! Don't leave me alone," she trailed off. If dragons could cry, Lightning would be sobbing.

Suddenly, a loud groan emanated from his chest. Lightning leaned forward, peering into his face, frantically looking for a sign of consciousness.

He whispered something, his voice barely audible.

"What?" she cried. "What is it?"

"\_Can'tâ€|\_"

"You can't what? Toothless, you can! You have to!" She was close to losing it. "Please, Toothless!"

"\_Can't breathe."\_

Her mouth opened in a silent 'O', and she sat up to see two bright green eyes peering up at her in the darkness.

As soon as she had moved off his neck, Toothless took a deep, refreshing breath. \_That hits the spot. \_His head hurt like no other. But gazing up at an obviously distraught Lightning, he couldn't help but smile a little bit. She didn't want him to die. She didn't want him to leave her. \_She cares. \_Andâ€| she was on top of him.

The same thought seemed to pass through her mind as her eyes widened in sudden embarrassment, and she tried to move off of him. But he held on to her. \_Maybe it was the head injury, but he felt pretty good for a dragon who had just fallen out of the sky. Then again, he'd had a bit of practice with Hiccup and his stupid flight suitâ€|

—

Lightning couldn't believe that he wouldn't let her up. His eyes were focused on her, and he still had that same stupid smile on his faceâ€| \_Okay, it's not stupid. It's pretty cute. \_But they were in a really awkward position! And she was still pretty sure the Alpha didn't really like her all that much. \_Maybe it's his head injuryâ€| \_She tilted her head, checking his pupils. They were wide, taking in all the light they could. \_Taking her in.\_

\_Oh, my. \_

"I'm glad you're not dead," she whispered.

"I wouldn't miss this for the world," he replied, jokingly.

Obviously, his brain was just fine. She gently placed her head back onto his chest and softly inhaled, the sea and sky and forest smell of him soothing her. Letting her forget for a moment that he was the Alpha and she was no one.

Beneath her, Toothless was genuinely thrilled. He hadn't felt this good since—well since forever. But the events of the day had taken their toll, and he could feel his body beginning to protest its injuries. And as much as he would like this moment to last for eternity, he had a lecture to deliver.

Using his forelegs, he gently pushed her into a sitting position, but didn't let go of her shoulders. Surprised, Lightning looked down to see that his smile had faded and had been replaced with a frown.

"What," Toothless began, "were you \_thinking? \_You tried to let go of me, on purpose! Don't you know you could have died?"

Outraged, she and jumped off of him and snapped back. "And don't you know \_you \_could have died?! What would these dragons do without their Alpha? What would Hiccup do without you?"

Toothless tried to interrupt but she barreled on. "If I had died, it wouldn't have mattered. I am \_no one. \_But you are someone, someone important and necessary and loved, and I couldn't just let you die." With that, she turned around and sat down.

\_You are all those things\_. \_You are someone. And I couldn't just let you die.\_ But he didn't say it. Instead, he rolled onto his stomach and resisted the urge to throw up. His head spun and he couldn't see straight. He barely choked out, "I'm not dead yet."

"Not for lack of trying!" Lightning still didn't turn around.

Toothless, his vision less blurred, took a deep breath and tried to stand. Immediately sharp pain shot through his side, and he fell back to the ground. Hearing this, Lightning finally looked over at him, and despite her anger, she knew couldn't- and wouldn't- leave him like that.

Toothless had closed his eyes. The pain was too great, all over his body. Maybe if he just stayed right there and didn't move it would stop—

"Come on." The words were spoken low but clear, and he forced himself to open his eyes and ignore the dizziness.

"Come on where?"

Lightning sighed. "I think there's a creek or some kind of running water nearby. I can hear it. You're covered in blood, and so am I. Let's go get cleaned up."

It was painful to his ego, but he finally said, "I don't believe I can."

She didn't respond, so Toothless looked up to see if she was even listening. Her glowing blue eyes were trained on him, and her face had a patient expression on it. "Toothless," she murmured. "We can't stay here. If we are going to be found, we need to find an open space. We also need to figure out how badly you're injured, and what we can do about it. Come on, I'll help you."

Toothless snorted weakly, and tried to tease her. "You're awfully small to be carrying me around," he said doubtfully.

"I'm not that small!" she said defensively. "And I am strong enough to help you walk. So shut up and try standing again."

\* \* \*

><p>Somehow, they made it to a quiet river running through a meadow of soft grass. The perfect spot. Lightning supported a dizzy and wounded Toothless as they stepped into the cool water, and they both sighed as it ran over their scales.<p>

Toothless lowered himself into the shallows until he was resting in the stream traveling around him, and Lightning rolled in the water until she felt certain that his blood had washed off her completely. She shivered. It wasn't that she had a problem with blood, butâ€¦ \_I never want to see another drop of \_his\_ blood again. \_

That was easier said than done. Toothless was still a mess. She examined his hide in the moonlight to evaluate his scratches and found that most were superficial, but a few were deeper and would require more care. There was a small tear on his left wing where a branch had punctured the membrane. All in all, though, he was one lucky dragon. His eyes were closed, and he was breathing slowly, but she didn't make the mistake of assuming the male was asleep.

His head throbbed, and though the cool water soothed his burning wounds, Toothless knew that eventually he'd have to clean them more thoroughly. As he allowed his thoughts to drift, he thought of Lightning. \_She's obviously insane, trying to let go of the dragon saving her life. \_Butâ€¦ \_she cares. She doesn't want me dead. She doesn't want me to leave herâ€¦ \_He sighed, eyes still closed.

He felt some of the water being splashed over him, and before he could even wonder about it, something warm and slick moved over his side. His eyes shot open and he looked around, only to see Lightning laying close next to him, \_licking \_his wounds.

No dragon had ever cared for him that way. Toothless had always taken care of himself, as the most independent of all the dragons, but now, when he couldn't, another had stepped in. And he supposed that it was almost predictable, the "last" Night Fury and the female Fury that had simply washed up on shoreâ€¦ Well, he couldn't ignore such a perfect coincidence. Obviously the gods were playing some kind of game. This was too good to be true, but Toothless found that he just didn't care anymore. He was sick of feeling lonely.

Her tongue hit a particularly ticklish spot and he jumped, startled.

Surprised, Lightning realized that Toothless had been watching her, and she hadn't even noticed. Despite the amount of pain he had to be in, his eyes looked clear and focused to her as they gazed at her face. She had cleaned up his side quite a bit, because dragon saliva does actually have some mild healing properties. \_How convenient, \_she mused.

She scooted closer to lick his shoulder, thenâ€¦ she slowly licked his neck.

Toothless froze. There was nothing wrong with his neck, as far as he could tell. But thatâ€¦ felt good. \_Really, really good\_.

Lightning paused, and in that pause Toothless took the opportunity to take one of his battered wings and rest it on her, pressuring her to move closer. He wasn't strong enough to force her, but she complied, until their bodies were pressed together. Refusing to over think this, she nuzzled her nose into his neck and stayed there. Toothless, even in his weak and muddled state, felt his protective instincts kick in, andâ€¦ something else. So he took his tail and used it to trace patterns on her back, causing her to shiver and press even more firmly into him.

As they both drifted off into sleep, Toothless heard her repeat quietly: "I'm glad you aren't dead."

\_I wouldn't miss this for the world. \_

\* \* \*

><p>When Toothless awoke it was early afternoon. Hearing running water, it took him a moment to remember he had slept outside, in a river, in the middle of nowhere. Slowly he opened his eyes, pleased to note that his head was no longer spinning.<p>

Dragonflies buzzed and darted around him, as though displeased by his presence, although he couldn't imagine \_anyone \_being displeased by \_him\_.

\_He was just so charming, after all. \_Without checking he knew that he was alone, which only bothered him slightly. \_It was rather nice to have a sleeping buddy. \_The thought surprised him, but he didn't feel like suppressing it. Hadn't he decided that he was tired of things being the way they were?

Slowly, he moved to a sitting position, noticing a painful gash on his right foreleg. \_That could be a problem later. \_He yawned, and felt a stinging sensation above his eye. \_Another good one. Maybe it'll leave a dashing scar. \_

\_Well, time to take stock of all the bumps and bruises. \_Toothless started with what was causing him the most anxiety. Bit by bit he extended his great, bat-like wings, focusing on every inch of them to make sure nothing was out of place. There was some stinging on his left wing, he assumed it was a small tear, but other than that they were just remarkably sore from trying to slow down so much more weight than they were used to. \_He'd have to inform her how terribly fat she was later. \_He snorted. That would probably be amusing, seeing as how she was perfectly svelte and fit. \_Just perfect in general, really. \_

He gulped. \_Uh ohâ€¦ now is not the time to act like a love-struck hatchling, troll-bait. \_Toothless was a little concerned about how she might feel about him. It was obvious that she cared- \_or was it? The only thing that was obvious was that she didn't want him to die and leave her stranded out here. \_

Frowning, he shook his head to clear it of that unpleasant train of thought. \_She cared. She had to.\_

Gradually he stood on all four legs, and rolled his shoulders experimentally. Those were also sore, but not injured. \_Thank the gods- he could probably fly, if need be. \_He rolled his eyes. He'd been doing quite a bit more god-thanking since Lightning had shown up on Berk, and he couldn't tell if that was good, or just exasperating. \_You have a lot to be thankful for. \_That was true, he supposed. How had he existed before without this stubborn, spirited little female? Life seemed more alive with her around. He reallyâ€¦ liked her. Yes, that was all. \_Right? \_Toothless was certain that he was in dangerous territory, but again, couldn't really stop his thoughts from traveling in that direction. \_Couldn't, or wouldn't?\_

Shaking his head again, he took a step forward, and didn't fall on his face. \_Good start.\_ Wading out into deeper water, he began to swim slowly, stretching out his muscles and further waking himself up. When he could no longer feel the rocks underneath his paws he dove beneath the surface, eyes open, and watched a few nervous fish dart around him. His stomach rumbled, but he knew he wouldn't be fast enough to catch anything. Still, he enjoyed being underwater. Things were slower there. It was another world, one where he could be alone with his thoughts and a few fish.

Staying submerged as long as he could, he crept along the bottom of the river back as it rose up to become the shore. When it became too shallow, he raised only his eyes and the top of his snout above the water, pretending to be a predator from the depths. Blowing a swift breath out of his nose, he sent a small spray of water into the air. He looked around, seeking prey.

\_There. Just upstream. \_An unsuspecting Night Fury, wading in the shallows. Its back was to him. \_Perfect. \_Toothless grinned evilly, sharp teeth glinting as he sunk back beneath the rippling surface. Tucking in his legs and wings, he swam like a snake along the river bed, keeping his prey in sight as he ducked behind submerged logs and large rocks.

Lightning stood in the cool water, lost in thought. She had spent all morning catching fish and exploring the meadow. There was even a small patch of dragon nip near the trees on one side- it took all of her concentration and willpower to walk away from it, promising herself she would return later. \_Speaking of returning laterâ€¦ \_she should probably check on Toothless. She had stayed near him for most of the morning, keeping an eye on him, but he hadn't stirred once. A few times she had checked to see if he was actually still breathing, just to make sure.

Still confused, she kicked a few stones resting by her feet. They rolled in slow motion, barely moving as the current pushed them in the opposite direction. She liked Toothless- a lot. \_There, she'd admitted it. \_There was no denying that fact. She was willing to \_die

\_for him; it would be stupid to keep pretending to be indifferent. But would he resume his indifference? One moment he was ignoring her, the next he was close to her, teasing her and making meaningful eye contact- \_whatever that means. What was she, a lovestruck hatchling?

\_

\_Yes. \_

The thought caused her to scowl and blow a ring of smoke from her nose. \_No! Not at all!\_

\_Yes, you totally are. Stop kidding yourself. \_

Miserably, her scowl faded. What could she do? He was the \_Alpha.\_ And she was \_no one.\_ Almost literally no one. She stood silently for a moment, warring with herself.

\_No, she couldn't. \_

\_Yes, she totally could. He was a Night Fury, she was a Night Furyâ€¦ come on! It was basically fate. \_

\_No, you are just a random dragon who randomly ended up on a dragon- and human!- \_infested island. \_

\_He had saved her life, without even hesitating to risk his own.\_

\_Of course he did. Any halfway decent Alpha would protect his own.\_

\_But to that extent? And why did he always pull her closer? And what was that thing with his tail last night? \_It had almost tickled, but felt so good, andâ€¦ \_close. He made her feel not alone, he made her heart singâ€¦ \_She scowled again, nearly growling. \_How corny was that?! Hearts don't sing. They beat. They pump blood. They are otherwise irrelevant. \_

\_Admit it.\_

\_No. \_

\_Come on.\_

\_No!\_

\_You totally love him.\_

\_No way!\_

\_Yeah way.\_

\_No! It's impossible. \_

\_It's definitely not, because you definitely are. \_

\_Noâ€¦ \_her mental protests grew weaker, and her wings drooped.

Without warning something grabbed her leg and pulled her completely

underwater. She screeched, a stream of bubbles escaping from her mouth. Struggling, she managed to pull away and swiftly turned around, ready to attack- \_oh.\_

It was Toothless, and he was most definitely laughing at her.

\_Oh, he's gonna get it.\_

Toothless couldn't contain his evil glee as he watched her surprised face. That is, until her shock turned to more of an "I'm going to murder you and then kill you again" look. He gulped, and quickly turned tail, swimming as fast as he could with the current, leaving behind a stream of bubbles. When he felt that he had traveled sufficiently far, he peeked over his shoulder. But she was nowhere in sight.

\_Where had she-\_

Something large and black crashed through the surface above him and smashed into him. Toothless rolled onto his back, desperately trying to shake it free, to no avail. It clung tighter to him, taking its small paws and hitting him repeatedly until he finally stopped struggling. He closed his eyes and pretended to pass out.

\_What was he- oh crap. \_He was wounded! Lightning was terrified all over again. "Toothless!" she shouted, but the sound of his name was garbled underwater. Swiftly she wrapped her forelegs around him and kicked off the bottom of the river, shooting straight up to the surface. Gasping for air, she began swimming to shore, hauling his dead weight. She made a mental note to later inform him how fat he was, which would be amusing, although he was almost purely muscle.

Pulling him onto the shore, she laid him on his back and checked to make sure he was still breathing. He was, but it was shallow. \_Too shallow. \_

"Toothless! I swear, if you die on me now, I will follow you down to Hel and kill you again!"

He made a strange noise and Lightning moved closer, listening carefully. "Oh," he gasped. "OH!" His eyes opened and he stared straight up at the sky, before taking one paw and crossing it over his chest and holding the other straight in the air, as though reaching for something.

"I seeâ€¦ I see a light!"

Lightning didn't know if she was relieved or closer to murdering him than ever before.

## 14. Chapter 13

\*\*Shoutout to Colinou for being such an awesome reviewer! And thanks to Midoriko-sama for all the great advice. I really appreciate so many people taking the time to read, even if not very many of you review ;) \*\*

\*\*Last chapter had a happy ending, let's hope things stay that



way!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>After she had smacked him in the face and lectured him about how it wasn't nice to scare other dragons all the time, Lightning took pity on Toothless and grumbling, brought him some of the fish she had caught.<p>

Toothless ate slowly, aware that the female was watching him closely. \_Was it too soon to regurgitate some fish for her? \_He almost laughed aloud, but kept that particular thought to himself. Scaring her was great fun, even though she was probably about ready to fry him with a plasma blast to the face. Finishing his meal, he licked his lips and met her blue gaze. "Thanks for the fish," he said sincerely, trying to get back on her good side.

"I was just returning the favor." \_So she was going to play like that, was she?\_

"I could have caught my own fish!" They both knew this was a lie, although he had moved startlingly quickly when he had fled from her earlier. For a moment, neither of them spoke.

"How's your wing?" Toothless suddenly asked. He had almost forgotten about why they had crash landed, and he was worried that it might have been injured again.

"Actually, it's alright. Just tired," she said, slowly stretching it out to its full length before tucking it back against her side.

Lightning gave him a careful once-over. The antics of the early afternoon obviously hadn't done him any harm, but he still looked like he had gotten into a fight with an entire forest and come out on the losing side. \_Which was basically what had happened. \_

The long red scratches on his sides and wings made her stomach churn, and while the cut above his eye would probably leave a rather dashing scar, the gash on his foreleg looked more painful. However, he'd probably never admit it, which was a little bit admirable and a lot bit irritating. Then she noticed his tail.

Toothless saw the look of dismay on her face. "Oh, no!" Toothless, your tail!"

\_Crap! \_He had completely forgotten to check on the prosthetic! quickly he lifted his tail and turned to examine it. The red material was shredded, and some of the smaller metal pieces were either bent or missing completely. Well, so much for flying. \_I take back my gratitude! \_He thought angrily towards the sky, assuming that's where mischievous and meddling human gods resided.

He groaned. \_They were stuck here.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless smiled. <em>They were stuck here.<em>

Several days had passed and the two Night Furies had enjoyed a lot of

free time. Mostly they just napped in the sun until it was too hot, then moved to nap in the shade. They competed to see who could catch the most fish with their eyes closed. Lightning took Toothless to the dragon nip patch and they both, feeling warm and fuzzy and elated, began chasing each other around the meadow, not too fiercely so that Toothless wouldn't get tired out, but quickly enough to get the adrenaline pumping. Every evening they curled up next to the stream, not quite touching, but somehow during the night they shifted so that when they awoke, they were curled around each other.

Toothless found this to be an excellent development, but for some reason Lightning still felt shy and uncertain. \_This was amazing, butâ€¦| what would happen when they returned to the village?\_

The sixth morning, Toothless woke up, alone again. He'd had very pleasant dreams, one in particular where he had regurgitated a fish for Lightning. Delighted, she had licked his face repeatedly, before eating the piece of fish and then returning the favor.

He sighed. \_Dreams are great, but what about reality?\_

Standing, Toothless stretched out like a cat and yawned, before sniffing the air. He'd recognize Lightning's scent anywhere. It was sweet and clean, like a bunch of fresh flowers. But no flowers that he'd ever smelled before. \_Better flowers. \_He was too much of a male to have ever really enjoyed the merits of flowers, but he was starting to consider them to be one of life's finer creations.

So he followed the smell of "better" flowers, until spying two black ears sticking up out of the tall grass. Toothless crouched, wanting to sneak up on her. As he stealthily got closer, he could see that she was sitting upright, playing with some yellow butterflies. Just before he pounced, she said just loudly enough for him to hear, "Don't even think about it." Deflated, he slunk around her in a circle, watching one of the yellow bugs land on the tip of her nose. Lightning sneezed, then laughed as the butterfly flew off.

"The deadly Night Fury stalks his unsuspecting prey," Toothless intoned in a deep, threatening voice.

"The 'prey' prepares her secret weapon," said Lightning mysteriously.

\_Secret weapon? \_Toothless pondered for a moment. \_She's bluffing.

—

"He draws closer, and closer, and cloooooooserrrrrâ€¦|" Lightning fought to keep herself from laughing, refusing to look at him as he approached.

"The prey waits, completely unsuspecting," she replied, playing along.

"Suddenlyâ€¦|" Lightning tensed for the attack. "He disappears!" \_What?\_

She quickly turned around, but he was nowhere to be seen. \_Hmmâ€¦| \_his smell still lingered, but she didn't bother following it.

"ROAR!" Toothless leapt from the tall grass, and they rolled around, wrestling for the upper hand. Finally he had her pinned on her back, and yelled, "Submit!"

"Never!" she cried.

"You give me no choice," Toothless said solemnly. In a flash he retracted his teeth and was pulling on her ear, causing her to laugh in surprise.

"But wait!" at her voice he froze, her ear still in his mouth, waiting to hear what she had to say.

"The helpless prey deploys her final, most secret weapon!" His eyes followed her paw as it left his face and traveled down his side, slowly.

His eyes widened. \_She wasn't going to-\_

\_TICKLE HIM!\_

"AH!" he cried out, leaping off of her. But like her namesake, she was up in a flash, and tackled him, tickling his ribs more. Toothless gasped and desperately tried to roll free, but while she was small, she more than made up for it with her tenacity.

"Hah!" she let up and laughed triumphantly, still sitting on him "Now it's your turn! Submit!"

"Never!" he cried.

"Then you leave me no choice." Just as Lightning was about to resume her attack, Toothless reached under her forelegs and ran his claws along her ribs.

The strangest noise escaped her mouth, right before she began to giggle- \_can dragons even do that?- \_and squirm. With an evil grin, Toothless rolled them so he was once again on top, and mercilessly continued his tickle assault until she was laughing so hard she couldn't breathe.

"Mercy! Mercyyy!" she gasped.

"Oh, I don't think so," he retorted menacingly.

"Please, I'll do anything!"

\_Anything?\_

"Anything?" he asked, his ears perking up.

"Umâ€¦ anything?" she squeaked.

"Hmmmâ€¦ this is quite a tempting offerâ€¦" Toothless relaxed until his full weight was trapping her against the ground, and he tapped a claw against his chin like a human would.

She should have been uncomfortable, but Lightning was actually quite happy where she was. Although slightly nervous about what he was going to make her do.

Still thinking, an idea slowly began to form in Toothless's mind. \_Maybe he could force her handâ€¦\_ "I've got it." Peering down, he pinned her with his intense green stare.

"I dare youâ€¦"

Lightning gulped. \_A dare?\_

"â€¦ to tell Hookfang that you love him when we get back to the village."

\_What?!\_ "But I don't want to tell Hookfang that I love him!" she yelled instantly. Too late, she caught on.

"Oh really?" Toothless tilted his head, a smile forming on his face. "And whyyyy would you not want to do that?"

"Becauseâ€¦ becauseâ€¦" \_Because I love YOU!\_

"Becauseâ€¦ I don't love him?" she finished weakly.

Toothless shook his head. "Tsk tsk, that's not a good enough answer."

"Umâ€¦" desperately she tried to think of something that would just get him off her. Anything to distract him.

Toothless spoke first, to the air. "Gasp! What if she doesn't want to tell Hookfang she loves himâ€¦ because there's someone else?!" His evil smile returned and he looked back down at her.

She froze, unable to respond.

Toothless tilted his head in the opposite direction, his expression softening. "Is there someone else?"

\_Yes. No. \_Lightning was miserable again. What good would it do to tell him that she liked him- \_liked \_him liked him?

"Lightning." his voice was very low, and she met his eyes. She saw something there that she had never seen before, something that he had never let her see. And her fear ebbed away.

She took a deep breath, and shut her eyes tight. "\_Yes." \_she ground out.

Toothless didn't say a word. After a moment of silence her nerves returned and she half shouted, "I'm sorry!" before shoving him off of her and rolling to her feet. She shook herself and began to walk away, when he finally spoke.

"I'm not."

\* \* \*

><p>"I wonder where Toothless is," muttered Stormfly.<p>

Overhearing this, Hookfang added, "Yeah, and Lightning. They're been gone for days." .

Meatlug spoke up, "I hope they're alright."

Stormfly shifted nervously. She hadn't told anyone what she had seen that afternoon, and she was starting to worry that maybe she had gotten the wrong impression. The words bubbled up in her throat. She bit her tongue, trying to suppress her guilt.

Suddenly they heard a roar from the docks. \_What now? Was it Toothless?\_

Hopefully, Stormfly and the other dragons hurried towards the edge of the village, where several dragons were gathered.

"What is it?" asked Hookfang. One dragon, the strong-but-silent type, just gestured out toward the horizon. Hiccup and the other humans weren't around, but Cloudjumper flew up with Valka on his back and joined them, squinting out towards the setting sun.

Stormfly had no idea what it could be but a chill ran down her spine, and out of the corner of her eyes she saw similar expressions of concern on the faces of the other dragons. Even Valka looked worried.

For a minute, they saw nothing. Then, far, far, far off in the distance, a black speck appeared in sky.

## 15. Chapter 14

**\*\*What could it be? Is it a bird, is it a plane? Or something far more sinister?\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Stormfly and the others kept watch throughout the night. More and more dragons joined them in silence as time wore on, but at some point they lost track of the speck.<p>

"Maybe it's not headed this way," Meatlug said hopefully.

"Maybe," Stormfly replied halfheartedly, but she and the other dragons weren't so optimistic. Something was wrong. \_Where was Toothless?\_

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless smelled like flowers. And that was 100% okay with him.<p>

Yesterday, after he had forced Lightning to admit her feelings for him, he had felt kind of bad, but mostly relieved. \_Maybe she won't leave, after all.\_

Lightning had been horrified. \_He was such a jerk!\_ Until Toothless had soundlessly moved over to where she stood and began to nuzzle her neck ever so softly. Her stupid, traitorous heart melted.

She just didn't understand. Without her memory, without her past, what value did she have? Toothless had committed such great acts of

valor and strength and importance. She didn't know if she had done anything worth noting. Maybe she wasn't even a good dragon at all! Her heart sank. Lightning had no idea who she had been, and every time she tried to remember, her head would explode with pain.

Toothless should want to be with a dragon as accomplished and as strong and as selfless as he was. She even tried to tell him this, but he had brushed the comment aside, saying simply, "I want to be with \_you.\_"

And so she allowed herself to succumb to him. He was irresistible, he was fierce, he was wonderful.

And when they woke up the next day, his larger body curled around her smaller form, Lightning smelled like the wind and the sea and the forest, and Toothless smelled like— well, flowers.

\* \* \*

><p>It was midmorning when the village gave up the watch. There was no sign of anything in the sky, and there was work to be done. Slowly, the dragons and the Vikings that had joined them trickled away from the docks, filtering through the village. Gobber had returned, and the sound of metal clanging could be heard from his forge, along with the occasional, "Grump! You let the forge go out!" followed by a loud explosion.<p>

Hiccup was deep in conversation with his mother, and Astrid stood next to them, listening in. "Do you know what it was?" he asked.

"No," Valka answered. "Maybe it was a dragon, but if it was— it's probably long gone. Best we not dwell on it."

Hookfang, Barf and Belch, Stormfly, and Meatlug walked together, muttering to each other. They couldn't shake the feeling that something just wasn't right.

A shadow passed over the path before them and they looked up, eyes narrowed at the morning sun. Far above them, what looked like a dark bird wheeled around in the sky. Stormfly squinted, putting all her effort into discerning what it might be. \_No, it couldn't be a bird— \_

"I think— I think that's a dragon!" exclaimed Meatlug. Nearby dragons noticed them staring skyward and too began murmuring. Soon humans had joined them, and the village fell silent once again.

Suddenly, a faint screech echoed around the village. The hair on the humans' necks stood up on end, and some of the dragons hissed warily.

The circling dragon seemed to grow larger as it descended, but it was moving too quickly for any of them to gauge its actual size or what type of dragon it was. Another roar sounded, and many eyes opened wide. The sound was unmistakable.

Quickly, Stormfly backed into the shadows and began creeping between

houses, moving as fast as she could without being detected towards the edge of the village. By the time she had reached the final line of houses, the unknown dragon was swooping back and forth over the main square, and an eerily familiar whistle was building as it flew.

The panicked blue Nadder leapt from her hiding spot and flew as fast as she could. Thankfully, the only ones who noticed her disappearance were Hookfang, Barf and Belch, and Meatlug. Stormfly doubted she would have lasted long if the dark blur had caught sight of her.

As she entered the forest, dodging trees with skill just as she had practiced with Astrid so many times, the whistle climbed to a screaming pitch before the sound of a massive explosion reached her sensitive ears. Terrified, Stormfly shot forward, pumping her wings as fast as she could. \_She had to find Toothless.\_

Behind her, screams echoed as the unknown Night Fury charged up for another attack.

## 16. Chapter 15 Pt 1

**\*\*My goodness, things are getting a little out of hand!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup had sensed immediately the danger posed by the new dragon. "Get out of sight!" he shouted to the villagers. "Find cover! It's a-"

"Night Fury!" someone had screamed, right before the first blast struck.

The Chief refused to panic. \_Where was Toothless? \_He had to find his dragon if he wanted any hope of combatting this danger.

He waved to his mother to catch her attention. "Mom!" She turned, trying to push through the throngs of panicking Vikings. "No! Get Cloudjumper and see if you can stop this!"

Valka shouted an affirmative and, snatching up her staff, ran for a snarling Cloudjumper, who immediately spread his four wings and took to the skies, leading more dragons to defend Berk. But how could Hiccup get Toothless when he had no idea where the black dragon even was? Out of the corner of his eye he spotted Snotlout and the others with their dragons, preparing to take off and join the fray.

"Wait!" he yelled, and ran over to them. Astrid was there, but her Nadder was nowhere to be seen.

"Hiccup! Stormfly's gone!"

He immediately turned to the other dragons, ignoring their riders for a moment. "Do any of you know where Toothless is?" The reptiles shook their heads. "Well, do you know where Stormfly went?" When Hookfang spread his wings in affirmation, Hiccup called out to his friends. "Get on your dragons! We're going to fix this!"

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless rested in the sun, his eyes closed. His head rested gently on Lightning's neck, and he breathed her in contentedly. It was another beautiful, lazy day, and the Alpha was busy <em>not <em>being the Alpha. The time for that would come soon enough, but he didn't want to dwell on it. Nope, Toothless was feeling much better, as if he could take on anything in the world. Little did he know that chance was approaching much more rapidly than he would like.

Lightning's ears perked up and she lifted her head, moving Toothless out of the way. "What is it?" he grumbled good-naturedly.

"I hearâ€|" she trailed off, listening. "Someone is coming. They're calling forâ€| you. Someone is looking for you, Toothless." Her voice grew anxious and she rose from the ground, stretching quickly before taking a defensive stance. Toothless immediately joined her, pupils slitted, searching the skies.

"Toothless! \_Toothless!\_"

\_Stormfly? \_"Stormfly! We're over here!" he roared.

The blue Nadder soared into view and nearly crash landed in the meadow before sprinting towards him. Toothless stepped forward, concern growing. "Stormfly, what's going on?" he asked as she panted, catching her breath.

"Attackâ€| dragonâ€| \_Night Fury.\_" the last words she spat out. Suddenly she turned on Lightning, her face speculative, before beginning to growl.

"What-" Lightning started, but Stormfly interrupted her.

"This must have something to do with \_you.\_ Night Furies are supposed to be all but gone, and here two show up within two months of each other! What are you hiding?!" the blue dragon demanded.

"Stormfly," Toothless growled in warning, stepping between her and Lightning.

Stormfly finally seemed to pick up on his behavior. "Waitâ€| you didn't actuallyâ€| with \_her?!\_" She roared her frustration. "How could you, Toothless?"

Toothless was saved from having to answer when he heard more frantic shouting in the distance.

It was the other dragons andâ€| \_Hiccup was with them\_. Something was very, very wrong.

He let out his loudest Alpha roar, and flocks of birds took off from the nearby trees.

Even as he turned back to the two females, Stormfly was advancing on Lightning, who refused to give up any ground. The Nadder hissed. "There's no way that this is a \_coincidence\_."

The words sent ice straight into Toothless's heart. The shouts of the dragons and riders drew closer, but they were still a few minutes



away.

A voice spoke up. "You're right. It's not." Alarmed, Toothless looked at Lightning, but she looked just as surprised as he did. All of their breaths caught in their throats.

Behind them, another Night Fury had landed, and was watching them coldly.

\* \* \*

><p><em>What a lovely little meadow. <em>Flame watched the three dragons turn slowly towards him. The Nadder was of little importance to him. He had merely followed her here on a hunch, and it had proved correct.

No, it was the small Night Fury that caught his attention. \_Finally.

—

His speculation was interrupted by a low growl. Not showing his surprise, he glanced over at the other Night Fury in the meadow. That was some roar he had. He was big, bigger than Flame, but he looked somewhat worse for wear. Sort of scratched up. Flame couldn't imagine what had caused that. He wasn't going to tempt fate by asking, so instead he just ignored the irate dragon and focused back on the smallest. \_What had happened to her? \_Her hide was badly scarred. On her back was a strange looking&#160;| burn? She didn't look too pleased to see him, either. \_Interesting.\_

But enough of this. Cinder's distraction in the village wasn't going to last long, given the sheer number of dragons and humans opposing him. Flame's mission had been to find the female and, if he couldn't extract her, leave and return with reinforcements. But he had a few moments to attempt to reason with her.

\* \* \*

><p>"Skygge."<p>

Lightning's ears went flat against her neck. "What?" she growled at the nameless Fury.

"I said, '\_Skygge'.\_"

"Yeah, I heard you. What does it mean?"

He actually looked surprised. But it wasn't endearing, like when she caught Toothless unawares. His eyes were a yellowy green, but they weren't as bright or expressive as Toothless's. She hated the way he was watching her.

"You mean, your name?" \_What?\_

"What?" Toothless growled again, interrupting. He might be a little beat up but he would kill this unknown Night Fury if he made a single step in the wrong direction.

The Fury across from them sighed in exasperation. "\_Skygge. \_Your name is \_Skygge.\_" He said it again. \_Skih-geh. \_

"That's not my name," she retorted. She didn't even like the sound of it.

"Skygge, we grew up together. It's definitely your name. What happened to you?" he asked her, with obviously growing distaste. "And where are we?"

"This is Berk," Toothless said harshly. "My home. \_Lightning's home.\_"

"Oh really?" said the unpleasant Night Fury. "And exactly how long has \_Lightning \_been here?"

"Long enough!"

"Pardon me if I have a hard time believing that," he replied snidely.

"Who are you?" both Toothless and Lightning shouted at the same time.

"Oh, my \_apologies.\_ I am Flame, and I am here to bring Skygge- or, \_Lightning, \_home."

\_Home?\_

Lightning's mind was spinning out of control. Splitting pain erupted in her skull, and it was all she could do not to hiss in frustration. \_Why couldn't she remember?\_

\* \* \*

><p>Flame was growing weary of this game. Obviously there had been some kind of accident. Skygge didn't recognize him at all. In fact, she looked like she was in serious pain. Which, after some thought, didn't really upset him too much. They had never gotten along. She had alwaysâ€¦| disagreed with his methods.<p>

But it only made things more complicated. Time to change tactics. Maybe freshen up her memory.

"Brann has been worried sick looking for you," he started.

"Whoâ€¦| who is Brann?"

Flame feigned shock. \_Maybe a little deception might come in handy, here. \_"Why, you don't remember Brann? Your \_mate?\_"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Oh, snap.<strong>

\*\*Thanks to Tephra for "Skygge"!\*\*

## 17. Chapter 15 Pt 2

\*\*I didn't want to do this, but things are starting to get a little crazy. So here I am, \_begging\_ you to please shoot me some reviews! Again, this is my first fanfic, so I could really use some

constructive feedback. (Of course, I also love hearing when I do something that you like. So, you know, that's cool too.)\*\*

\*\*You're all awesome, thanks for sticking with me!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless couldn't believe what he was hearing. <em>Thisâ€¦ why hadn't he thought of this? Of course it was a possibility, why hadn't he considered itâ€¦ <em>His chest hurting, he looked in shock to Lightning for an answer.

But the smaller female- \_his female- \_couldn't speak. Her eyes were wide with terror and a shock that likely dwarfed the way Toothless felt. \_Thisâ€¦ wasn't her fault.\_

Lightning couldn't breathe. \_I haveâ€¦ a mate? \_Ignoring the smug Flame across the meadow, she turned and looked at Toothless, trying to explain, but she had nothing. \_She couldn't remember having a mate. \_

Toothless could see her pain. He immediately moved to be close to her. \_Well, I already took someone else's mate. I might as well try to keep her. After all, I \_am \_an Alpha. \_His weak attempt at humor fell flat in his own mind, and he shook his head.

"Lightning," he said softly. "Lightning, look at me." Finally she did, meeting his green eyes with silver eyes ridden with guilt and sorrow.

"Toothlessâ€¦ I don't rememberâ€¦"

"I know, love. It's not your fault." \_It was his. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Stormfly had had enough of this obnoxious Night Fury. Who did he think he was, coming to Berk and causing trouble? She felt guilty for having unknowingly led him here, but she'd had no choice. Toothless was the only one who could handle the situation, but as she looked at the Alpha, she realized his prosthetic was missing. <em>He couldn't flyâ€¦<em>

No one was allowed to cause trouble for Lightning except for her. Looking up, Stormfly could see Hookfang leading the others down to join them. The blue dragon ruffled her wings and stepped forward. "I think it's time for you to leave, \_Flame,\_" she hissed\_. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Flame scowled. His little white lie had been only partially effective. It had definitely confused Skygge, or Lightning, or whoever she was. But the bigger one didn't seem like he was too perturbed by the announcement of Skygge's "mate". In fact, he seemed to grow more energized at the challenge.<p>

And when the Nadder had stepped forward to threaten him, well, Flame decided it was probably time to exit the scene. But more dragons were coming now, he could see them preparing to land. He had no doubt that they had either captured or killed Cinder, and his fate would

probably be the same if he wasn't cautious.

"Maybe you're right, my dear Nadder," he called smoothly. "But have no doubt, I will be back."

As he taunted her, a Monstrous Nightmare, a Zippleback, and a Gronkle landed nearby, a group of humans dismounting with weapons raised. Oddly enough, one carried a large bundle of equipment that looked nothing like a weapon, but Flame had learned to be cautious around humans. They all kept their distance though, probably watching to see what he would do. Well, he would be leaving, for starters.

He was about to take off when a commanding roar echoed around the meadow. It wasn't as loud or authoritative as the big Night Fury's, but it was still impressive enough to give him pause.

\_Ah, \_Flame thought, once again interested. \_A Stormcutter. Always the most fun and friendly of the bunch. \_Smiling slightly at his own cleverness, Flame decided that it was probably unwise to try and leave with this many dragons and humans ready to completely destroy him.

The Stormcutter circled, a strange female human standing on his back. She raised some kind of staff, and it made a rattling noise that mesmerized him.

\_No. \_Flame knew what staves like that were for. \_Controlling dragons. Who were these humans?

"Alpha Toothless!" the Stormcutter called down. "We have taken down the other Night Fury, what would you have us do with this one?"

\_Alpha? Toothless? \_Flame looked with some confusion at the large Night Fury who once again was staring at him with clear bloodlust. Well, the \_Alpha \_bit was certainly going to make things difficult. Especially seeing as how he appeared to have a full set of very sharp teeth. Obviously, Skygge wasn't going to be going with him, even if he did somehow managed to depart.

Seemingly reading his mind, the Alpha roared at him, all of his teeth present and accounted for. "Listen, \_Flame. \_You are going to leave, now. You are going to go back to this \_Brann \_and tell him to call off his search. Lightning no longer belongs with you. She belongs here, on Berk." At that, Lightning looked up at Toothless, with hope in her eyes. \_Did he still want her? He wasn't going to send her away?

Flame scowled, displeased with the arrogance of the Alpha. "Very well." He gave the female- whatever her name was- a threatening leer, making sure she didn't get too comfortable. Obviously Cinder wasn't coming, he was either seriously injured or dead. So Flame took off alone, flapping his wings at an unhurried pace. He didn't bother looking back.

Oh yes, he had every intention of delivering \_Toothless's \_message, but Brann wasn't really one to take no for an answer. He had a very nasty habit of getting what he wanted.

## 18. Chapter 16

In the village, chaos reigned.

After a brief skirmish between the lone Night Fury and half the dragon army of Berk, the Vikings (after a few test fires) had successfully shot down the agile black dragon using one of Hiccup's old contraptions.

Gobber was having a hard time controlling the angry sea of adrenaline-fueled warriors without the help of Hiccup or Valka. Both humans and dragons called for the execution of the small rogue Night Fury in their midst, who had been knocked unconscious by the many blows dealt to him. He had caused quite a bit of damage, setting whole rows of houses on fire and leaving craters in the streets.

For some reason, he hadn't actually managed to harm or even touch a single human or dragon. All that had occurred was mindless destruction of property. The Vikings were pleased at their battle prowess, because of course so many years of fighting the dragons had left them able to avoid all dragon-related injuries. But some dragons didn't share their riders' confidence. A few of them had their suspicions that had the Night Fury wished to harm them, he would have. But why was he here, if not to kill?

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless kept his eyes trained on Flame until he was sure the other Night Fury had truly gone for good. With a snort of <em>good riddance, <em>he turned around. The humans and their dragons were getting over their surprise and confusion rapidly, and it was only a matter of time before they rushed over, surely to ask him countless questions and demand his return to the village immediately.

But he only had eyes for Lightning, who stood trembling with an expression of fear and confusion on her beautiful face. Quickly he crossed the short distance between them and nuzzled her, trying to reassure her even as he was desperate to make sure she was his. The silver left her eyes, leaving only luminous blue. She gave a soft whimper, nuzzling him back, before moving to sit at his shoulder. By his side. They could talk later. Right now, they would wait for the tide of Vikings and dragons to reach them.

"Toothless!" Hiccup cried, breathless as he ran, carrying his saddle and all of Toothless's flight equipment. For some reason, he'd had a hunch that Toothless might not have returned because he was physically unable to, and it seemed that he had been partially correct. The other, far more important reason for his dragon's disappearance appeared to be sitting next to the missing Alpha, her blue gaze directed towards the ground. Hiccup couldn't suppress a grin as he put two and two together. Gently setting all the equipment on the ground, he stepped forward, holding out a hand to each dragon. "Hey, you two. We missed you," the Chief said simply as he stroked Lightning's nose and scratched behind Toothless's ear. "Do you think you're ready to come back?"

All the dragons but Cloudjumper and Stormfly hung back impatiently, waiting for Hiccup to finish with the two Night Furies so that they could begin their own interrogation. Hookfang, while mildly jealous of Toothless's obvious good fortune, simply wanted to make crude

jokes and flirt shamelessly with the Alpha's female. Meatlug was overwhelmed by the whole series of events, still out of breath from their swift flight from the village to the meadow. She was perfectly willing to wait until Lightning was alone to get some answers. The Gronkle rested on the ground next to Fishlegs, who could hardly contain his excitement. He seemed to be talking to himself, muttering about "Night Fury communities" and "complex relationships" and "communication". Barf and Belch just wanted to express their displeasure at the lack of violence.

Stormfly was conflicted. On the one side, she wanted Toothless for herself. But on the other, it was apparent how much the two Night Furies cared for each other, and the Nadder didn't want to be the one getting in the way of the Alpha's happiness. Sighing, she supposed she had already made her decision regarding the matter, seeing as how she had defended both Toothless and Lightning in public. So, she waited for her turn to express her congratulations, already feeling better about the situation. \_There are plenty of dragons in the sky.\_

Valka and Cloudjumper stood to the side, the human relating her suspicions and opinions on what had happened to the Stormcutter, who quietly responded with nods and \_huffs \_of air. She believed that Toothless and the Night Fury in the meadow had been fighting over Lightning, and that the smaller black dragon captured back at the village had simply been a diversion. Valka was right, of course, but she never could have imagined the complexity of the situation. None of them could, because Lightning was still without her memories, and was therefore unable to communicate what was the truth and what was just a ploy to get her off of Berk. Nor was she able to explain yet how she had ended up on Berk in the first place, although that was something that the other dragons seemed willing to overlook.

Cloudjumper was just glad Toothless had figured things out. The Night Fury's internal conflict had been giving him a headache. Now, he waited to discuss with the Alpha the events that had taken place back at the village, and to ask what he wanted to do with the small Night Fury they had captured. He also wanted to make sure that Toothless understood that these unknown dragons had gone to a lot of trouble just to make contact with Lightning. The Stormcutter doubted this Flame would actually stay away for long, and he was almost completely certain that the unpleasant Night Fury would return with more than just a little diversion.

Astrid and the other riders stood near Fishlegs and Meatlug, half listening to the large young man's excited babbling and half discussing among themselves what they had just seen. "I can't believe there are \_two more \_Night Furies," started Ruffnut, for once completely serious.

"Yeah, do you think we'll get to name them? I still have some good ideasâ€¦" said Tuffnut, rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

"No, stupid!" Snotlout spoke up. "Toothless \_obviously \_scared him away. With help from Hookfang, of course."

"Yeah, but what about the other one back at the village? Do you think they killed it, or will Hiccup try to train it?" Tuff continued. This

was all so thrilling, the male Thorston could hardly stand it.

Astrid, who had mostly been watching Hiccup interact with the dragons, finally turned and looked at them. "I think the one back at the village was a distraction, just so this one could find Toothless and Lightning. But why?" she wondered aloud.

"I think you're right, Astrid." Valka's lilting voice brought all the younger Vikings to attention. Hiccup's mom walked up, followed closely by a vigilant Cloudjumper. "We captured the dragon back at the village before we came here. From what I could tell, he was rather small, possibly only a juvenile. Maybe Toothless will have a word with him," she added rather mysteriously.

Astrid smiled at her future mother-in-law. "Do you think that the other one, the one Toothless was growling at, will come back?"

Valka's expression darkened, as did her dragon's. "We can't be certain. All we can do is be prepared."

## 19. Chapter 17 Pt 1

**\*\*Review, ye scurvy dogs! I have no idea what I'm doing! Toothless doesn't always seem to know what he's about, either, but that's more of a dragon problem.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Flying with Hiccup was one of Toothless's all-time favorite activities. But as they returned to the village, the other dragons and riders in formation behind them, the Alpha found himself distracted, thoughts shifting between images of Lightning and Cloudjumper's warnings.<p>

The heart-to-heart with Lightning would have to wait a little longer. Strangely enough, the idea of even having a heart-to-heart at all didn't freak him out. \_Was he growing soft? \_Alarmed, Toothless shook his head and refocused, all his mind working on the conundrum of the entire situation.

He would have to try and coax information out of the captured Night Fury. That was their only lead in this confusing affair. But how would he get the unknown dragon to talk? Toothless doubted that the other Fury would just open up and tell them everything they wanted to know. No, he had a sinking feeling that more drastic measures might have to be employed. But he refused to hurt another dragon without justification. That was just in his nature. \_Right? \_Toothless preferred to encourage, not destroy. \_And if he could deal with the antics of the unbiddable dragon hatchlings, he could extend his patience to anything. \_But he had no way of knowing what the captured dragon's personality would be like, or how well he had been trained by his clan and what exactly they had trained him to do. Where Toothless was unwilling to go, would the other Fury already be there?

Lost in his own thoughts, he didn't notice that Lightning, once again strong enough to take to the skies, hung back at the rear of the

group of dragons and riders. She knew very well that Toothless would want to talk to her later, and while she relished more time with him- and only him- she found that she was hesitant to try and figure this mess out.

She hated Flame. She hated the darkness he had brought upon them, the confusion and hurt. \_He'd better not show his stupid face around here again or I'll tear it off myself. \_His snide comments, the way he had made her feel worthlessâ€| made her feel even more unworthy of love than she had felt before. \_It's just not fair.\_ She had been so happy, the happiest she had been since arriving on Berk. She didn't want some other mate, a dragon probably just like Flame. Sarcastic, derisive, dismissiveâ€| maybe just downright mean. \_Flame was horribleâ€| but if he was horrible, and if she was assuming that Brann was horrible too, then what did that make her?\_

Miserably, she tried to clear away the negative thoughts and focus on the positive. The other dragons and humans on Berk had gone out of their way to protect her, especially Toothless's friends. Not to mention that Toothless himself had put on his tough Alpha face and stood up to that jerk Flame, even though it would have been easier to give her up. Toothless had done that- even though she suspected he didn't like to use his power as an Alpha- just to keep her on Berk. \_With him. \_Lightning tried to be objective, but she couldn't stop the warmth curling in her chest. \_There were definitely a lot of positives. \_After he had sent Mr. Rotten-fish-for-brains packing, Toothless had comforted her, and acted like nothing had changed. \_Even though Flame's cruel words had changed everything.\_

Lost in her thoughts, Lightning hardly noticed when Stormfly gradually guided her rider out of the formation so that they flew side by side. Astrid, while she would have preferred riding closer to Hiccup, had heard endless theories on dragon communication from her fiancÃ©e and Fishlegs and decided to let her dragon "chat" with the still-mysterious Lightning while she went over some of the logistics of her upcoming wedding.

The female Night Fury, pulled from her rumination, nodded a silent greeting at the blue Nadder.

"So," Stormfly began, a little awkwardly. "You and Toothlessâ€| are mates now?"

Lightning raised a brow questioningly, but her mind was already at work, trying to figure out how to respond.

It was a layered question, and called for more than just a "yes" or "no" answer. This was not even counting Flame's claim that Lightning already had a mate. But, if one simplified it as far as they could, the answer was actually no. Lightning and Toothless were not "mates." Not yet, at least. There were, in fact, courting rituals particular to the Night Furies. Lightning knew this, but somehow, without a clan to uphold those customs, those rituals seemed like a mere formality. Especially since she had never witnessed any other mating practices between any other type of dragon, Lightning figured it might be more of a "to each dragon their own" kind of deal. Toothless probably had no memory of the traditions of his kind, having served the Red Death for so long, but even though she had lost her memories, some of the acts were ingrained in Lightning's psyche. Someone had obviously taken the time to educate her on her "culture" if it had stuck in her



mind, although she had no idea who or why. \_Maybe the Night Fury back at the village could shed some light on who she really was. If she knew where she was from, knew something about the dragons who had named her and raised her and trained her- maybe she would remember.

-

But even if she did get her memory back, Lightning felt certain she would never willingly leave Berk.

Sheâ€| \_she loved Toothless\_. She loved Toothless and she was actually starting to believe that he might love her, too. When he had forced her to admit that she had feelings for him, she had, without words, consented to the notion of becoming his mate. \_And I will be, if he will still have me.\_

Suddenly, her thoughts gave her an idea. \_She could initiate the ceremonial courtship and lead Toothless through it. \_Then they would be a legitimate Night Fury couple- well, legitimate in name, at least. The less formal aspects of courtship, finding each other and other, more\_, \_ah, \_physical\_ components of the whole business had sort of already taken place. (If she were human, Lightning would have been completely red with embarrassment at this point.)

"Lightning?" Stormfly looked a little concerned, and the Night Fury realized that she hadn't actually answered the Nadder's question.

"Sort of," was all Lightning could think to say to sum up her thoughts on the matter.

Stormfly seemed to consider her answer thoughtfully, before nodding slowly. "Iâ€| I'm happy for you. Both of you."

Lightning was surprised by this development, but hid her curiosity. She had figured Stormfly just didn't like her, but maybe she and the rather-vain-but-well-meaning blue Nadder could get along, after all. "Thank you, Stormfly. I appreciate it." She paused, then decided to continue. "I have a feeling Toothless and I are going to need all the support we can get."

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder lay curled up on the cold stone floor in the largest cell of Berk's rundown jail. He was far from full grown, so there was plenty of space around him. Those enormous humans had thrown him in this cage while he was still unconscious, and while they had unwrapped the cords from around his legs, they had left his wings bound, and the ropes cut painfully into the soft membranes. <em>They had really done a number on him. <em>He had to stifle a wince as he shifted his weight to lean more on his uninjured side. \_Show no weakness.\_

No one had entered or left the prison since he had awoken, although someone had thought to leave a bucket of water in the corner of his cell, next to a small pile of fish. He peered at the slack jaws and unseeing eyes on the slimy fare, and immediately decided he wasn't hungry. \_All he had been doing was following orders. Distract the Vikings and the dragons, cause as much damage as possible. \_He swallowed nervously. Flame had casually told him to kill as many as he wished, but Cinderâ€| didn't.

It's not that he just didn't want to, although that was a part of that.

\_\_He was a weakling. \_\_

Cinder was quite well known as the mostâ€¦ explosive of the younger Night Furies. That had made him popular among the older dragons for competitions and gamesâ€¦ or in the case of the new leader and his cronies, as the perfect, \_disposable\_ weapon. So he went on raids with them, destroying homes and leveling small human settlements overnight. That was all well and good, as long as he didn't have to hurt anyone.

Why? \_Because he was an overgrown chicken.\_\_

The ugly truth was that not only did Cinder find killing distasteful, he also abhorred causing pain of any kind. He couldn't even fish for himself because he couldn't tolerate the pathetic flopping that started as soon as he pulled one from the water.

Instead, his little sister had to fish for him, and \_then \_she'd have to take off their heads so he couldn't see their tiny dead faces.  
\_Oh, Ashâ€¦\_

Suddenly feeling very alone, Cinder swallowed thickly, desperately trying to quell the violent emotions that were surging through him.  
\_Show no weakness.\_\_

He was old enough to remember the last clan leader. \_He'd been nothing like Brann. \_No, Shade had been \_kind. \_He had encouraged Cinder to explore, and had not condemned him when he showed hesitation while hunting for small animals. Shade had actually been the one to convince Ash to catch and behead the fish for him, so that he wouldn't get upset. \_Some Night Fury he wasâ€¦ \_but Shade had never made him feel bad about it. He was like the older brother that Cinder had never had, looking after him when his parents were killed by human trappers.

When Brann had taken over, Cinder found himself in a very precarious position. Before, he had been encouraged to experiment with his developing plasma blasts in secluded but supervised areas. After Shadeâ€¦ after heâ€¦ well, Brann and his scary friends always made him shoot around the caves, and then at other dragons, dragons \_forced into the air by Brann as a punishment \_so that he and his friends could watch them desperately try to evade the blasts exploding in their midstâ€¦ and as they had grown more and more weary, they became slower and slower, until one at a time they would be hit and fall from the sky like stones, dead before they hit the ground.

Cinder always missed on purpose, but he knew he had hurt a few dragons in the process. Being so young, he really didn't have much control over the power and size of his blasts, so it was always a guessing game, and sometimes he guessed wrong.

Cinder wanted to shut his eyes and forget, but he couldn't stop the flood of thoughts. Burying his head in his paws, he slowly rocked back and forth.

When Brann had figured out that Cinder was purposely avoiding the captive dragons with his blasts, he had been angry. His wrath had only increased when Cinder, not completely understanding or knowing any better, had weakly protested. \_"Shade never-" \_He had been harshly cut off by a snarling Brann.\_"I\_ am the clan leader, and you will\_ \_obey \_me\_"\_

He still had faint scars from the thrashing he had received that day. One stretched across his eyelid, a single slash mark, a testament to violence and hatred.

That eye was currently swollen shut, thanks to a particularly determined Gronkle. Cinder didn't even want to think about the burns and bruises on his side from those overeager Nadders. His head hurt, but he was pretty sure it was because of the weights attached to the ropes having smashed into his skull when the snare had collided with him in the air.

Anger rose. Cinder hated pain and death, and refused to strike back, no matter how roughly he was handled. He would rather die a thousand times before he let someone else take the fall for him, or receive a punishment on his behalf. It happened, though. The elder dragons had tried to protect him and the other young Furies. One by one, Brann had murdered them, until less than a dozen of the wise ones were left.

Too caught up in the nightmarish visions, Cinder didn't hear the door to the prison open.

Then, a week ago, their violent leader had caught Ash as she was catching fish and beheading them.

\_"What are you doing, little one?"\_

Not recognizing the threat, she had replied innocently. \_"Cinder doesn't like things to hurt. He doesn't like looking at the dead faces. So I take them off."\_

Hiding in an overgrown bush, Cinder had watched the exchange with growing horror. He'd wanted to cry out, \_"Fly away, Ash! Get out of here!" \_But it was too late.

A long whimper escaped him. Ash had still been alive when Brann had forced Cinder to accompany Flame on this mission. Brann had told him that he wouldn't harm her any more if Cinder did what he said.

\_I wish I was dead. \_

It wasn't the first time the thought had passed through his mind. He wasn't totally aware of how cynical and disillusioned he had become, but he was pretty sure dragons his age weren't supposed to be dealing with life and death matters, or evil, twisted things like Brann.

\_But he didn't have a choice. \_If he failed, Ash would be killed in cold blood, if Brann hadn't already decided to do so. Somehow, he had to get out of here. He had to go back and prove to Brann that he had followed orders.

Somehow, he had to rescue her.

But how could he? He wasn't an adult, and he definitely wasn't strong enough to fight Brann \_and \_his messed up friends. He had no one besides Ash, and now she wasâ€¦ Cinder couldn't even think about it.

\_It was all his fault.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hope you liked this one. I'm definitely experiencing some intense writer's block so please be patient as I slave away at this all-consuming story for you ungrateful peeps ;)<strong>

\*\*Thanks for reading, I'll update soon!\*\*

## 20. Chapter 17 Pt 2

\*\*Okay, not a lot happens in this chapter so you might have to be patient. But I felt it was necessary, soâ€¦ so yeah. :)\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless sat quietly, observing the dragon in the cell. Its head was buried into its front legs, and it was rocking back and forth, perhaps in an effort to calm itself. He had never seen a dragon do that before, but then again, this was a <em>young</em> <em>dragon</em>.

Suddenly it let out a long moan, its face pressed against the floor, and Toothless worried that the skirmish above the village had caused it serious injury. He leaned forward and asked quietly, "Are you alright?"

\* \* \*

><p>Startled, Cinder lifted his head and froze. Right outside his cage was another Night Fury. This one was big. Bigger than Flame, bigger than Shadeâ€¦ maybe even as big as Brann. But this one had bright green eyes that peered at him in the dim light, and his voice soundedâ€¦ concerned.<p>

\_Show no weakness. \_

The phrase flashed through his mind, even though he was pretty sure this other Night Fury had already seen him shaking on the floor. He wanted to shout, \_NO, I'm NOT alright. \_But he didn't trust anyone, anymore. He'd just have to figure out how to convince this Night Fury to free him.

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless hadn't prepared himself for dealing with a <em>hatchling</em>.

A large, silvery green eye dominated one side of the young Night Fury's face. A scar crossed over the other, which looked to be mostly swollen shut, making him look slightly feral. The expression on his small face was one of clear distrust, but there was definitely a

calculating look in his eyes- well, eye.

Toothless cocked his head. "Should I just assume that you are okay?"

The small Night Fury in the cell looked surprised, then distrustful again. But still he said nothing.

\_Two could play at the silent game, \_but for some reason Toothless felt that there was a better way to handle the situation.

"So you can't talk. Pity." he started, noting the slight narrowing of the young dragon's good eye. He continued, "I suppose I must talk enough for the two of usâ€| where should I startâ€| hmmâ€| Well, I am Toothless, for starters."

The young dragon looked confused again, and Toothless, without retracting his teeth, gave him a big smile. An expression of fear crossed his face and the older Fury almost laughed out loud.

Toothless gestured with one paw at the fish. "Not hungry?" he said lightheartedly. But the young dragon simply glanced quickly between the larger dragon and the small pile of fish in his cell, then looked down at the floor.

\_Huh, that's weird. \_Toothless supposed that the dragon didn't want to eat, but he'd figure out why later. "Look, kid."

The small Night Fury looked back up from the floor, frowning. But Toothless continued. "Yeah, you heard me. You're a kid. I'm not going to hurt you. You don't have to be afraid."

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder considered Toothless's words, before snorting derisively.  
<em>You have no idea.<em>

\_Maybe he should talk.\_ But what could he say?

\* \* \*

><p>"Do you know where you are?" Toothless tried again.<p>

The so-far nameless dragon gave a slight shrug. \_Sort of.\_

"Shall I tell you?"

No response. \_Well, Toothless had time. Maybe telling the young one about Berk would loosen him up. But where to start?\_

Toothless went back to the very beginning.

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder hadn't been expecting a story. No one told him anything anymore.<p>

He tried to keep a bored expression on his face as Toothless spoke. But the Red Death sounded like a pretty scary dragon, scarier than

anything he could imagine. \_If Toothless was its slave, then what was he doing here? And how did the humans fit into the whole picture?\_

Then Toothless told him about the one night, the fateful raid that had ended with him being shot out of the sky. Cinder's eyes widened. \_He \_had just learned first-hand what it was like to be shot down, and it hadn't been pleasant. Toothless had fallen much, much farther than Cinder had. \_How was he even still alive?\_

But Toothless wasn't finished. He told Cinder about waking up to a \_human \_standing over him with a knife, about to cut out his heart. "I was trapped, I couldn't move. All I could do was watch as he raised the blade above his head" and then, when it seemed like my time had come, the human instead cut my binds, freeing me."

\_What?! Humans don't free dragons, they trap them and they kill them!\_

Cinder wanted to ask how Toothless had killed the human after that, but he kept his mouth shut.

The bigger dragon surprised him even more when he said, "I jumped up and trapped him against a rock with my claws around his neck, reared back, and" roared in his face before getting out of there as fast as I could. But even though I was not longer tied up, I wasn't free."

\_What did that mean? \_

"One side of my tailfin had been torn off in the fall."

Cinder's good eye was as wide as it could possibly be. He'd heard stories of what happened to dragons who couldn't fly. \_A downed dragon is a dead dragon.\_

As if reading his mind, Toothless began to tell him about the human again. About how it had found him again in the cove he had been trapped in. About how it started bringing him food. About how one day, it had shown up with a new tail for him.

\_What?! \_Cinder thought his head might explode. \_Humans" He peeked around Toothless, trying to see his tail.

Toothless seemed to understand, and slowly pulled his tail around from behind him and held it up for Cinder to see. One half of his tailfin was black, his real tail, and the other half was bright red, the one the human had made him. \_So" how did all the dragons end up here with the humans? \_Cinder wasn't so sure anymore that the dragons were human slaves, not if that human had saved Toothless and gave him the ability to fly again.

Toothless kept telling his story. He and the human had begun to fly together because he couldn't move the new tail by himself. They had become a team, in secret. Then came the day Toothless had to save the human from a Monstrous Nightmare (Cinder didn't know what kind of dragon that was but it also sounded scary) in the human's dragon slaying arena and was captured in the process by the other humans.

But they hadn't killed him either. Instead, they trapped him and forced him to lead them back to the Red Death's nest.

Cinder couldn't believe the humans' stupidity. \_Surely if they knew about the Red Death, they would have stayed far, far away\_

"But they didn't know what they were dealing with. They thought they could walk in and fight off the dragons in the nest, frighten them away for good. Instead, when they cracked open the side of the nest with their giant rock-throwers, they unleashed the fury of the Queen," Toothless said ominously.

Cinder listened with growing horror as Toothless recounted the destruction of the human ships with one fiery breath, how the Vikings fled just when it seemed that they would all die, Toothless's human and some others appeared, flying in on dragons! They distracted the Queen and freed Toothless, barely escaping being roasted alive!

Toothless paused, as if considering how to continue. Cinder realized he had been holding his breath, and quietly shushed it out, trying to act disinterested.

"My human and I blasted the Queen in the face, but it barely made her blink. Then we flew up, then dove down, building up speed to blast her in the side. The power of it sent her to her knees, but she soon stood, and slowly spread her enormous wings. But that was the plan. We wanted to get her in the air."

Cinder was confused. \_Why would they want a giant, enraged dragon chasing them?\_

"My human is very clever, he always has a plan," Toothless said rather mysteriously. "The Red Death was furious! My human and I flew as fast as we could, dodging the giant sea stacks in the mist, but the giant dragon blew straight through them! Then, we led the Queen up into the storm clouds. I was hidden in the darkness, and we blasted her wings, again and again, until finally her fire caught on my tail and we were forced to fly back down."

This too mystified Cinder. \_What had been the point of all that?\_

"Right before she was about to blast us from behind, I turned and fired straight down her throat, lighting the gas and creating an explosion inside of her! As we cleared the clouds, she saw how close we were to the ground and she opened her wings wide, trying to slow her massive body down. But her wings were full of holes from my blasts, and when she opened them all the holes tore wider, and she was doomed."

Cinder winced at the thought of having holes in his wings. \_It must have been excruciating. \_But Toothless was still talking. The story wasn't over.

"When she hit the ground the fireball was bigger than anything I'd ever seen! I was desperately trying to fly through her spines, up her back, away from the explosion with what was left of my tailfin. We almost made it but it was too late, the fin burned off and the Red Death's giant club tail came crashing down on me! My human was

knocked out and he fell from my back, back into the explosion. My tailfin was useless but I dove down, flapping my wings harder than I ever had before, trying to reach him as the flames swallowed us."

Realizing that he was holding his breath again, Cinder coughed and shook his head. \_Dragons are mostly fireproof on the outside, but humansâ€| not so much. \_The odds were impossible. Taking on a dragon Queen singlehandedly and then falling from the skyâ€|\_ How had Toothless survived?\_

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless could tell that he had the young dragon hooked long before he even got to the part about the battle at the nest. But the older Night Fury wanted to excite and distract the kid, take his mind off of what had made him so distraught. His patience for hatchlings had grown over time, but he had never been particularly good with young dragons. The Alpha had really never had any practice dealing with them at all, and they sort of made him nervous. Butâ€| <em>it wasn't so bad. <em>In fact, Toothless was \_enjoying \_himself. \_How had he ever entertained the possibility of using force to get the small dragon to talk? \_Well, the small Fury wasn't exactly talking, but Toothless figured it was only a matter of time. \_Time to finish the taleâ€|\_

Outside, a crowd of dragons had gathered at the cracked open door and beneath the open window. Silently, they had waited to hear how the Alpha would deal with the rogue Night Fury. When Toothless began telling a story instead, they were at first outraged, but as he continued his tale the suspense and satisfaction captured their imaginations, although they all already knew perfectly well what had happened. They eagerly continued to eavesdrop, holding their collective breath. Who knew their Alpha was such a good storyteller?

Passing humans glanced curiously at the crowd of dragons around the jail, but shrugged it off as just another mystery for Fishlegs and Hiccup to figure out.

\* \* \*

><p>"In the aftermath, when the fire had all been extinguished and ash clouded the air, the humans began searching the area for my rider, their leader's son. Instead, they found me unconscious, my left tailfin burned off, and my saddle destroyed. Their enormous Chief, who had hated me the most, fell to his knees and apologized, devastated at the loss of his son. He knew it was his fault that my human and I had been forced to battle the Red Death, and the other humans felt responsible too. They had all gathered around me, and the dragons had landed behind them. Everyone was completely silent."<p>

Toothless stopped speaking, and for a moment Cinder was lost, feeling the heaviness of the death of the human. Outside, the other dragons struggled with sadness as well, even though they all knew Hiccup was alive and well, working in the forge with Gobber as they listened to Toothless.

\* \* \*



><p>Finally, Toothless continued. "I opened up my wings, and everyone was shocked, because I held my human in my paws, having shielded him from the explosion with my wings. Hiccup was alive, after all, and he had changed everything."<p>

Briefly, Toothless explained how Hiccup had been injured, but how when he awoke the village was overrun with dragons, coming to live alongside the humans in peace.

"And we all lived happily ever after, the end," he finished quickly.

It dawned on Cinder that at some point in the story, even before the ending, humans had no longer struck him as the enemy. He had to admit that in his own life, humans weren't the enemy either. No, a dragon had been the enemy for Toothless and the others, and the truth was that an evil dragon was the enemy for Cinder, too. \_Maybeâ€| maybe Toothless could help him, after all. \_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sorry for the long rundown of the first movie, I imagine most of you are familiar with it, but I wanted to share Cinder's perspective on it.<strong>

\*\* ALSO review, because writer's block is real, and it sucks, and I could use some feedback. \*\*

\*\*Thanks for being patient, y'all are the !\*\*

## 21. Chapter 18

"So, see you later." Toothless stood and stretched, turning toward the door as if he were going to leave.

"No, wait!"

His back turned to the cell, the Alpha smiled with satisfaction.

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder hadn't meant to speak. But he couldn't let Toothless leave. Somehow, he had to get out of this cell. <em>If that meant talking, so be it.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless watched the young male struggle with his thoughts. "What is it?"<p>

For a moment, there was no response. Then, the small Night Fury spoke up.

"Iâ€| my name is Cinder." \_A good start, \_Toothless thought, mildly amused.

"Aren't you hungry, Cinder?"

Cinder glanced at the fish, their faces blank. "Umâ€¦ no?" But even as he spoke, his stomach growled loudly.

Toothless cocked his head. "I didn't poison them."

"That's notâ€¦ I don'tâ€¦ I know," Cinder muttered.

"Then why don't you eat?"

The small dragon mumbled something that Toothless couldn't make out.

"What was that?"

Cinder cleared his throat, purposely not looking at Toothless. "Iâ€¦ I don't like their faces." He clamped his jaws shut, embarrassed that he had admitted that he was a coward so quickly.

Toothless was too surprised by the statement to laugh. "What do you mean?"

"Well," the young Night Fury said, sounding exasperated. "They're all \_dead,\_ someone killed them and they died and their stupid faces are all empty because they're dead."

"Soâ€¦" Toothless said slowly, "you don't like fish?"

"That's not it! They taste great. I just can'tâ€¦ with the facesâ€¦ you know?"

Silently Toothless considered this. \_A dragon who doesn't like killing his prey. \_Well, stranger things had happened. \_For example: he, a Night Fury, had let a strange Viking, the spawn of his sworn enemies, train and ride him, and he now risked his life regularly to make sure said Viking didn't get himself killed. \_So he wasn't really in a position to judge the idiosyncrasies of other dragons.

\_Maybe he should decapitate them for Cinder. Waitâ€¦ what?\_

"How about this," Toothless said. "I'll take the heads off of those fish for you if you answer a few questions for me.

Cinder's stomach growled again, so he couldn't really say no. "â€¦ okay."

"Move them over here. Okay," Toothless lay back down on the floor, taking one claw and beginning his task. "How old are you, Cinder?"

Purposely not looking at the fish, Cinder puffed up and replied, "I'm nine and three-quarters."

"So you're almost all grown up." Truth be told, Cinder was a little small for his age, but Toothless had a feeling that the young dragon more than made up for it with attitude. "Where are you from?"

Cinder pondered. "I'm not completely sure. I followed Flame here from the island. It's a day's flight away from the mainland."

\_Mainland?\_ Toothless remembered the map Valka had drawn in the snow

about a year ago. \_Is that where all the Night Furies were?\_

Calming his thoughts, Toothless continued his interview. "Why did Flame bring you here?" He wanted to hear his suspicions confirmed by the young Night Fury.

"I was supposed to be a distraction, while Flame completed his part of the mission."

"And what was Flame's mission?" Toothless tossed a few headless fish back in the cell, and Cinder snatched one up, biting it in half.

Chewing, he responded with his mouth full. "I dunno."

That didn't completely surprise Toothless, but he had just wanted to make sure. "Are there no other Night Furies old enough to have come with Flame to be the distraction?"

"Oh, there are plenty," Cinder scoffed. "But Brann sent me, as a punishment."

"Why was he punishing you?"

"Because Ash- because he found out about the face thing."

\_What? \_Toothless hid his shock. Yes, Cinder's dislike for death was a little unusual, but hardly something worth punishing. "Did Ash tell Brann about it?"

"Yesâ€¦| noâ€¦| she didn't mean to!" Cinder was getting upset, but Toothless wasn't sure how to calm him down.

"Who is Ash?"

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder felt like there was a gaping hole in his chest. The pain he had felt seeing Ash after Brann had gotten to her welled up anew, and he squeezed his eyes shut tight.<p>

"Cinder?"

"She's my sister." Cinder whispered.

"Where is she?"

"Brann has her."

"Is she alright?"

Cinder swallowed, barely able to say the words. "Noâ€¦| Brann broke her wings so she can't get away."

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless had never heard of anything so barbaric.<p>

"How old is Ash?" he asked, afraid to hear the answer.

"She's only five," Cinder whispered miserably.

"Where are your parents?"

"They were captured and killed by humans a few years ago."

\_Oh. \_Toothless immediately felt overwhelmingly sorry for the young dragon. No parents, an unquestionably evil clan leader— there was a lot resting on Cinder's shoulders. \_And speaking of an unquestionably evil dragon— Flame had said that this Brann was Lightning's mate. \_Toothless had to stop himself from growling. \_Not if I have anything to do with it. \_

Looking out the window, he realized with a start that the sun had almost set. He hated to leave Cinder alone, but he didn't have much of a choice. "Cinder?"

"Yes?" the young dragon replied miserably.

"I have to go, but I'll be back tomorrow. I promise," he said firmly.

"Okay—" the small Night Fury tucked his face into his paws. Not wanting to disturb him, Toothless made a mental note to remove the ropes from Cinder's wings when he returned. Silently, he got to his feet and slipped out the door.

He stopped short when he saw the crowd of dragons before him. "What are you all doing out here?"

Embarrassed at having been caught eavesdropping, most of them immediately backed away and disappeared into the village. A few, though, stuck around. "We were just listening, Alpha."

Toothless supposed he couldn't be upset about that. But he definitely was not in the mood to deal with them right now. "Well, now there's nothing more to hear." When none of them moved, he shooed them. "So go away!"

Grudgingly, they flew off, leaving Toothless shaking his head on the steps of the jail.

\_Now, to find Lightning. \_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>SHOUTOUT to my awesome reviewers and to The Muffin of Rage, because that username makes me unreasonably happy.</strong></p>

## 22. Chapter 19

Lightning lay outside the forge, watching the Vikings finish up their business in the dying light. Many shot her curious glances and slowed as they passed, obviously wanting to approach her, so she closed her eyes and rested her head on her front paws, feigning sleep.

After the sun had set and the square was empty, Lightning opened her eyes to see Hiccup and Gobber walking out of the forge. Both looked

slightly worse for wear, with black streak marks across their faces and their hair sticking up in random directions. But their frazzled appearances were belied by the wide smiles on their faces as they playfully bantered with each other, calling each other names, before wishing each other good night and parting. Hiccup saw her and approached, still smiling.

"Hey Lightning," he called. "How you doing, girl?" Crouching down in front of her, he rubbed her neck and scratched that sensitive spot- \_oh that feels good- \_until her tongue lolled out and she was grinning gummily back at him.

Hiccup laughed, but soon turned serious. Still crouched before her, he rested his elbows on his knees. "What a crazy day! I can't believe that \_two \_more Night Furies showed up here! Do you know them?"

Lightning shrugged, trying to express her confusion. \_Supposedly. \_But she couldn't remember Flame and she hadn't yet seen the captive Fury in the jail, so she didn't really have a solid response.

The human looked thoughtful, gazing up at the appearing stars. "I sure wish I could understand you. I get the feeling that something big is going on. I didn't like the way that Night Fury was eyeing you and Toothless this morning, so I'm glad Toothless got him to leave. But where did he come from? Will he be back?" He was addressing her, but the questions were mostly rhetorical. "I think human affairs are stressful, but compared to dragon politicsâ€¦" he broke off with a crooked grin. Lightning warbled in agreement. Hiccup rocked back to sit on the ground, one leg sprawled out on the ground, the other tucked close to his body. In silence they sat, watching the stars, each lost in their own thoughts.

That's how Toothless found them. For a moment he observed them, the two beings closest to his heart. He would have been content to stay there, watching them under the slowly rotating sky, but he knew he needed to talk to Lightning.

Even though he moved completely silently, Lightning sensed him immediately. Her ears perked up and she turned her head in his direction. Hiccup, noticing this, followed her gaze. Seeing his dragon, he slowly got to his feet to greet him.

The human intercepted his dragon, stepping in front of Lightning. "Hey bud," he said quietly, holding his arms open. Toothless bumped his head against Hiccup's chest, nuzzling his human. "I feel like I never get to see you anymore," Hiccup murmured. "That needs to change. How about we go flying tomorrow morning?" Toothless purred his approval, before peering around Hiccup to meet Lightning's blue gaze. She had watched the affectionate interaction with an unfamiliar warmth in her chest, realizing how much she actually liked Toothless's human. It occurred to her that had Hiccup not made the choices he had, she never would have met Toothless, and the idea of not having him in her life was almost unfathomable now. She owed Hiccup a debt of gratitude, gratitude for her happiness. Flame's comments had disturbed her, but she realized that she couldn't allow a past she couldn't remember dictate how she lived her future. \_No matter what happens, Toothless will be the one.\_

The thought intensified the warmth spreading in her, and she got to

her feet, stretching like a cat, before bumping her nose against Toothless's, effectively trapping Hiccup between them. "Hey!" he cried out, his arms in the air, feigning distress. Toothless and Lightning laughed, and Hiccup couldn't help but laugh along with the throaty rumbles.

"Alright, you two," the human finally said, extracting himself. "I have a date, and I imagine you'd like some alone time. So I'll see you tomorrow." Addressing Toothless, he promised to be at the shelter just before sunrise for their flight, and bid them goodnight, walking off with a spring in his step. Hiccup missed Astrid, increasingly, when she wasn't around, and he \_had \_made her a promise last week that he hadn't fulfilledâ€¦ Excited, he rubbed his hands together, the anticipation rising. The Chief could use a little \_play time\_â€¦

Not being privy to his human's, well, slightly \_indecent\_ intentions, Toothless had already sidled up to the smaller, blue-eyed female near him and rubbed his head along her shoulder and neck. Without speaking they began the climb through the village streets, up to the shelter at the top of the hill. His thoughts racing, Toothless wondered how to approach their upcoming conversation. He was nervous. \_What if she changed her mind? Most dragons mate for lifeâ€¦ maybe she actually wanted to go back to her old life, find her supposed "mate"â€¦\_ Toothless's thoughts were interrupted when Lightning intertwined her tail with his, and he almost sighed. \_Or maybe she would stay. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless opened the door and let Lightning enter before him. Pulling it closed behind him, he softly lit the fire in the middle of the floor. They had slept outside for a week, and it was almost strange being indoors. Someone, probably Hiccup, had filled the barrels with fresh fish, and there were several large buckets of clean water in the corner. <em>How thoughtful.</em>

Lightning went to her corner and began settling onto the pile of straw and blankets that had originally been set up for her. Toothless started towards his flat stone, paused, then walked past it, squeezing himself between a bemused Lightning and the wall. He wanted to be next to her. Realizing what he was doing, Lightning scooted over, giving him room to lay down his larger body. Without saying anything, he curled around her, and let her relax her weight into him. \_It was surprisingly comfortable. \_For a while they remained that way, content to watch the small fire flicker and crackle as it dwindled.

They both spoke at the same time.

"Toothless-"

"Lightning-"

Surprised, they looked at each other, then laughed. "You first," said Lightning. Sighing, Toothless organized his thoughts.

"I spoke to the Night Fury in the jail," he started.

Lightning looked both concerned and slightly angry. "Did he tell you

anything? Has he hurt anyone? How did you get him to talk?" Toothless had forgotten her tendency to ask a million questions at a time, but instead of annoying him, it only endeared her to him further.

"No, he didn't hurt anyone."

"Good." she growled.

"In fact, I imagine he was the only one with a single scratch."

\_What? \_Lightning was pretty certain that accuracy was a Night Fury specialty. \_Either he was dramatically, stunningly inept, orâ€|

—

"On purpose?"

Toothless wondered how much to tell her. "His job was to distract us." He paused. "I got the feeling that it was his own decision not to harm anyone, though. Flame didn't exactly leave an impression of benevolence."

Setting her head back onto her crossed forelegs, Lightning pondered this. So this captive Night Fury wasn't pure evil. "Can I see him?"

Behind her, Toothless hesitated. He hadn't learned all he had wanted to know from Cinder yet, and he didn't want to confuse Lightning further. But if he said no, she would either bother him relentlessly about it \_or \_go behind his back and see the young Fury anyways. So...

"Yes."

"When?"

"I supposeâ€| I'm going to see him again tomorrow. I'll find you after I speak with him."

Lightning pouted a little bit. \_She wanted to see this not-evil enemy immediately, to make her own judgements. \_But Toothless was the Alpha, and she understood that he made decisions for the good of everyone. "Fine."

Neither of them spoke, unsure of how to continue.

"Lightning?"

"Yes, Toothless?"

"Do you thinkâ€| do you think you might want to go back, to wherever those other Night Furies came from?"

She didn't respond immediately and Toothless's heart sank.

Lightning thought carefully about how to answer. Did she want to go back? Part of her did, but not for the reason Toothless was thinking of.

"Iâ€¦ I think I do."

Toothless couldn't suppress a dismayed groan. Hurriedly, she finished her thought. "Not because I want to leave Berk. I don't. But, I want to know who I was. I feel like the only way for us to move forward is for me to gain closure on whatever happened in my past."

\_Us. She had said 'us'. \_Toothless could not express his relief. "Then we'll go back. Together. And figure this out. But for nowâ€¦"

She smiled slightly. "For nowâ€¦"

In the last light of the fire they nuzzled each other, reveling in their closeness, unable to express themselves with words, but finding that they didn't have to.

\* \* \*

><p>"Bud? You in there?" Blinking, Toothless woke up to the sound of Hiccup's muffled voice coming through the door. A line of light framed the entrance, and with a start he realized that he had overslept.<p>

Next to him, Lightning stirred, and gave him a sleepy smile.

Trying not to disturb her any more, Toothless got to his feet and stepped around her as quietly as he could. "I'll be back soon," he whispered, quickly nuzzling the top of her head with his nose.

"Have funâ€¦" her quiet voice reached him as he approached the door.

Without thinking he turned. "Do you want to come with us?"

"Hmâ€¦ no. You two go have some alone time." With another smile she rested her head on her forelegs and fell back into a deep slumber.

Feeling warm, Toothless slipped through the door to greet a patiently waiting Hiccup.

\* \* \*

><p>Invigorated and unable to disguise his good mood, Toothless landed in front of the shelter after an hourlong flight. Hiccup jumped off his back, pulling his flight mask off with a laugh. "That was great, bud! I swear your corkscrews get tighter every time we fly. Pretty soon I won't be able to hang on!" Both dragon and rider knew that wasn't true, and shared a laugh. In the past six years Hiccup had become as skilled at the whole business of flying as Toothless was. Their bond was unbreakable, and they flew as one.<p>

Spying several Vikings heading their way, Hiccup removed Toothless's saddle and gave the dragon one last hug goodbye before heading down to greet them. "Mulch, Bucket! What can I do for you?"

Grinning, Toothless pushed open the door to the shelter and was greeted with the sight of Lightning still fast asleep.



Silently, he crept along the floor, until he reached where she lay. She shifted slightly, murmuring something in her sleep. Deciding it was time for her to wake up, Toothless smiled evilly, then gave her a huge lick along her entire face.

"What the- \_Toothless!\_" she shrieked. Laughing, he jumped back, but not far enough, because she leapt after him and tackled him to the ground. They tussled for a minute before she ended up on top, pinning him down as she rubbed her saliva-coated face against his.

"Gah, no! Stop!" Toothless begged. It was Lightning's turn to laugh evilly, and she refused to relent. When she was satisfied that her face was clean, she glanced down at his sticky, scrunched up face and decided it just wasn't sticky enough. "NO!" he shouted, as she licked his face repeatedly. As miserable as it was getting dragon spit all over his face, Toothless couldn't deny that he was enjoying every second of Lightning's retaliation.

"Hmmâ€¦" the villainous female inspected her handiwork. Seemingly satisfied, she rolled off of him. Sitting up, Toothless blinked, considering his options. Without a word he got up, walked over to one of the buckets, and submerged his head in the water.

Lightning laughed and pretended to scold him. "Toothless! That's clean water!"

Suddenly he whirled and sprayed water all over her. "Oh, it's on!" she yelled. Charging him, they rolled around on the floor, knocking over a fish barrel and scattering the blankets and straw. Growling, Toothless grabbed her ear with his teeth retracted and nibbled on it, before beginning a merciless tickle assault. Shrieking with laughter, Lightning desperately twisted, trying to escape, to no avail.

Finally, when she thought she could take no more, Toothless relented, and after giving her a moment to catch her breath, started nuzzling her neck. "Sorry?"

"Oh," she gasped. "You're going to be sorry. Later. I can't move right now."

Deciding that was fair enough, he stood up and stepped off of her, beholding the magnificent mess they had made. \_Wellâ€¦ hopefully Hiccup will be in a charitable mood later. \_

"Toothless?" He turned back and saw Lightning getting to her feet.

"Yes, love?"

She hesitated, then asked, "Do you think you have time to go flying with me?"

Toothless considered for a moment. He hadn't really been performing his duties as an Alpha lately, having not even been in the village at all for a week. There were sure to be conflicts in need of solving, requests to be made, humans to interact withâ€¦

"Of course."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Aw. Dragon love.<strong>

\*\* Review! The Alpha commands it. \*\*

## 23. Chapter 20

They were back at the cliff where they had launched their fated first flight together. Toothless still wasn't sure what Lightning had planned, but he followed her without question.

It was another perfect day. It had been perfect when Toothless had flown with Hiccup at dawn, and it only seemed more so now. Puffy clouds were scattered across the sky, and the sun shone from the peak of the heavens, a bright disc providing warmth and light.

The distant sound of waves crashing against the cliffs permeated the air. The ocean was a deep, emotional blue, but to Toothless, not even the sea or sky could compare to the color of Lightning's eyes.

\_Great. I've officially gone soft \_and \_insane.\_

Toothless's self-deprecation ceased when the small female turned around and pierced him with a gaze that left him breathless.

"Do you trust me?"

The echo of his question caught him off guard. "With my life."

Lightning offered him a slight smile, seemingly gathering herself.

"I love you, Toothless."

\_Waitâ€¦| what? What?!\_

Without another word she crouched down and backflipped off the edge of the cliff. Surprised, Toothless darted to see where she had gone (and to make sure she wasn't falling to her death) when she \_whooshed \_upwards, inches away from his face. She spiraled into the sky, and Toothless had to squint to try and track her against the blinding sun.

She roared. \_Well, that was an invitation if he'd ever heard one.\_

Toothless leapt skyward, pumping his wings to gain altitude and catch up to the female ahead of him. It didn't take him long, and as he came up next to her he shouted against the wind, "Where are we going?"

Her only response was another mysterious smile, before she banked left and away from him. Mildly confused, but enormously curious, Toothless allowed her to guide him through a series of complex loops and twists, taking them far out over the sea before leading him back

to fly over the forested island. Something seemed oddly familiar about the maneuvers, instinctual, almost as though he had done them before. \_That was impossible. \_But he found himself flying without having to think at all, following in her exact flight path. The longer they flew, the more certain Toothless became that this wasn't just a casual flight. There was something deeply significant about it, something intimate, somethingâ€¦| \_Could it be?\_

Suddenly Lightning spun upwards, and he followed her, higher and higher until the air was thin and Berk was far below them, the tall peak in the center ringed by clouds. In the distance, the other islands were visible to them, and for a few seconds he reveled in the \_awareness \_of the moment. She stopped, beating her wings to stay in place, and looked him in the eye. \_Why were they so high? \_Toothless rarely journeyed this high, mostly because Hiccup couldn't breathe at this altitude. Come to think of it, Toothless couldn't really either. They would have to go back down soon. \_What was her purpose in leading him up here? It seemed like aâ€¦| ceremony.\_

\_Ohâ€¦| \_

\_Oh.\_

Toothless understood, now.

Lightning saw the realization hit him, and waited to see what he would do. \_Either he would reject her, orâ€¦|\_

"Do you trust me?" he called out.

"With my soul," she answered.

He smiled. "I love you, too." With a wild roar he tucked his wings in and dove.

Heart racing, she followed. \_This was the moment of truth. \_The wind was deafening as they hurtled back to earth, as closely as they had flown the first time. But now, when he reached out for her, she intertwined her legs with his and pressed the entire length of her body against his without fear. Head first, their entire bodies touching, wings pulled tightly against their backs, they fell faster and faster. \_It was completely insane, incredibly dangerousâ€¦| there was a reason Night Furies were so selective when it came to their mates. \_They risked their lives to prove their devotion to each other, and if they survivedâ€¦| they would be accepted by the other dragons in their clan as a legitimate mated couple.

The ocean and Berk quickly magnified, looming closer until they could no longer see the island in its entirety. The village materialized on one end, and they could see the shapes of other dragons flying below them, colorful scales reflecting the sunlight.

A high-pitched whistle developed around the pair, growing louder and louder as they fell, until it reached a volume loud enough to catch the attention of Berk's inhabitants.

\* \* \*

><p>"What is that sound?" one Viking cried as men, women, and children gathered around the square, staring at the dark object

falling from the sky.<p>

Gobber paused his hammering and stepped outside the forge, wiping his brow. That soundâ€¦ sounded like aâ€¦

"Night Fury!"

\* \* \*

><p>Together, Toothless and Lightning fired, still attached to each other. Their individual blasts rocketed ahead of them before colliding in an enormous explosion. They plummeted through the flames, trailing fire and smoke behind them when they emerged on the other side. But now it wasn't just fire that illuminated them, it almost seemed as though they radiated their own light...<p>

The individual waves were visible now, the ripples flashing in the sun. In less than a minute they would crash into the shallow water, a collision that would instantly kill them both. They passed the edge of the cliff they had started at in a blur. \_Not yetâ€¦ not yetâ€¦\_ neither allowed their fear to overcome them.

\_Now.\_ Roaring, they pushed off of each other, spreading their wings to catch the air currents that would send them soaring back into the sky. The force of their parting sent wild sprays of sea water after them, and individually they shot along the surface, leaving trails of white in the blue water. Catching the wind, they followed identical curves back up, creating a perfect circle as they soared to meet each other at the apex.

\* \* \*

><p>The entire village was silent. Humans crowded the streets, and dragons crowded the rooftops. They had seen the projectile pass out of sight, until a faint roar echoed in the distance and two dragons rose upwards, following a curved path back to each other in the sky.<p>

Hiccup and Astrid stood at the top of the hill, watching the Night Furies' courting display in awe. Having run out of the house at the first cry of "Night Fury!", the couple had fearfully watched the two dragons fall from the sky, disappearing from sight untilâ€¦ they reappeared, flying separately, apparently none the worse for wear. Letting loose a loud "WOOHOO!", Hiccup grabbed Astrid around her waist and lifted her into the air, spinning around before pulling her in for a passionate kiss. Breaking apart, Hiccup murmured into her ear, "How much you wanna bet that Fishlegs wet his pants just now?"

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning and Toothless circled each other in mid-air, not breaking eye contact. <em>It was done. <em>

Both suddenly grinned, and burst out laughing.

"We almost died!"

"I know!"

"I love you!"

"I love you more!"

"Let's go!"

The pair raced to the meadow they had been stuck in for a week, elated, and didn't return to the village until the sun had almost set.

## 24. Chapter 21

**\*\*Hey :) last chapter was pretty fun. \*\***

**\*\*I NEED COVER ART! Let me know if you or someone you know can give me a hand with that. I'd really appreciate it. \*\***

**\*\*You know what else I'd appreciate? Guess. \*coughreviewscough\* \*\***

**\*\*Other than that, I love my reviewers and the many many many of you who are reading and not complaining. Here's to 4,700 views and counting! Cheers!\*\***

**\* \* \***

><p>Several days passed, and Toothless couldn't have been happier, even if it started raining fish.<p>

He attended his duties for a little while every day, before delegating to a jokingly disapproving Cloudjumper and disappearing with Lightning. One thing he did not neglect, though, were his visits to Cinder.

After he and Lightning had become mates and returned to the village, he had left her in the shelter, promising to return soon. Ignoring the astonished stares of the humans and the awed comments of the dragons, he had slipped into the jail.

Cinder immediately perked up at the sight of the older Night Fury. \_Maybe Toothless would tell him another storyâ€| \_He was slightly disappointed when Toothless apologized and said he couldn't stay long, but he more than made up for it when he cut off the ropes restricting the young dragon's wings from moving.

"Ahhh," Cinder had sighed, stretching the numb appendages, flapping them to get the blood moving in them again. They quickly became sore, and throbbed where the binds had cut into the thin membrane.

"Your eye looks better today," commented Toothless, and Cinder nodded his agreement.

"Yeah, it's nice to see through both eyes."

Noticing a fresh pile of fish in the cell, Toothless asked, "Do you want me to, er, take care of these too?" Toothless really wanted to get back to Lightning, but he couldn't ignore the wide, sad eyes of the younger dragon. \_Ugh, he's adorable.\_

"Do youâ€¦ do you mind?"

"Of course not."

Cinder got up to push the fish over to the cell bars, giving Toothless a clear look at his side.

"What happened to you?" Toothless exclaimed.

"What- oh, this?" the young dragon lifted his wing to peer down at his burned, bruised side, before shrugging. "Some of the dragons got a littleâ€¦ overeager when trying to get me out of the air."

Toothless was shocked. Yes, from what he understood, Cinder had been flying too quickly for anyone to get a good look at him, but still. \_He's small! \_He'd need to have a word with the dragons about the appropriate dispensing of force, even though he knew well enough that it was unwise to underestimate a small dragon. After all, even as an adult, Toothless was far smaller than the opponents he had faced, like the Red Death and the Bewilderbeast. And Cinder certainly packed a punch. The Vikings were still in the process of rebuilding the homes the young Night Fury had burned down, and everyone had to step around the large craters left in the streets to avoid breaking their necks by falling into the holes.

"I'll have someone come and take a look at it," Toothless promised, but Cinder objected.

"No! I mean, no, thank you." When Toothless lifted a quizzical brow, Cinder elaborated. "I don't want to be alone with humans."

\_Ah. \_Well, the older Night Fury couldn't blame him, considering the way the young dragon's parents had died. "Wellâ€¦ we will figure something out tomorrow. Do you need anything else?"

Cinder looked uncertain, suddenly seeming terribly small and vulnerable in the cell, and Toothless had to resist his rising protective instinct. \_Lightning is waiting.\_

"Alright, thenâ€¦ get some sleep, Cinder. I'll see you tomorrow."

\* \* \*

><p>The next morning, Cinder was awakened by the sound of the jail door opening. Sunlight streamed in through the doorway, and further out the distinctive warbling of the Terrible Terrors could be heard, announcing the arrival of the dawn.<p>

"Cinder?" It was Toothless. Stifling a yawn, the young dragon sat up and looked around, eyes landing on the older Night Fury outside of his cage.

"Hi, Toothless."

"How did you sleep?"

Cinder looked down at the hard stone floor. "As well as I could, I guess."

Toothless immediately felt bad about that, too. After being captured, the young Night Fury hadn't caused any trouble. But the Alpha had a plan.

"There's someone I want you to meet." Immediately Cinder looked more alert. \_Would it be a human?\_

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning waited outside of the jail, soaking in the early morning sun. She flicked her tail back and forth. Toothless had agreed to take her to meet the prisoner, and she couldn't shake her growing nervousness. Her mate hadn't seemed particularly worried, but she knew Toothless rarely showed what he was truly feeling. <em>What if he's mean and aggressive like Flame? <em>Part of her wanted to turn around and head back to the shelter, but she forced herself to stay put.

A few humans and dragons had left their homes and were beginning their days, but fortunately none had noticed her yet. Lightning inched further into the doorway, not feeling like talking to anyone.

Finally, the door cracked open, and she stood quickly, slipping inside. After a moment, her eyes adjusted to the dim light, and she saw Toothless's shining green eyes as he smiled at her. Her anxiety immediately calmed and she smiled back, moving closer to him. After nuzzling each other (even though it had been no more than five minutes since they had seen each other last), Toothless guided her down to the end of the row of cells.

\* \* \*

><p>"Cinder, this is my mate, Lightning. Lightning, Cinder." Cinder could hear the obvious pride in Toothless's voice as he introduced the new Night Fury. Her blue eyes betrayed her surprise at the sight of him, and whatever eagerness he'd had at the thought of finally meeting someone new fled Cinder's mind as he waited for a judgement to be passed.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning thought she'd been prepared for anything, but she was wrong.<p>

\_A hatchling? Flame's evil sidekick was a \_hatchling?\_

The small Night Fury sensed her surprise and seemed to almost withdraw, looking insecure.

\_He was just a kid. \_This snapped Lightning out of her surprise. "Hello, Cinder," she said, a little shyly. \_Although he was young, he was still a part of her past, and maybe, just maybe, he could tell her who she was. \_

The imprisoned dragon opened his mouth to respond when an expression of confusion crossed his face, and his eyes narrowed. "Iâ€¦ I know you!"

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken him a few moments to get past the strange scars on her hide, and the different name had somewhat obscured his memory, but Cinder was absolutely certain that he knew this female Night Fury.<p>

"You're Shade's sister!" he exclaimed. When she had disappeared, Cinder had believed that she had also been killed. But here she was! \_Waitâ€| why \_is \_she here? \_"What are you doing here?"

The female- \_what was her name, Sky?\_ \_Noâ€| Skygge!- \_looked taken aback, while Toothless had leaned in, looking interested. Finally, she answered in a soft voice. "I was hoping that you could tell me that."

\_What? \_His confusion must have showed on his face, because Toothless clarified. "Lightning washed up on the shore here a few months ago. She can't remember anything from her life before she ended up here."

\_Oh. \_"You don't remember \_anything\_? At all?"

She shook her head, blue eyes sad.

"Oh." Cinder sat up, feeling hesitant. "Wellâ€| I don't know much, they never really told me anything, but I'll try and tell you what I do know."

"Thank you, Cinder," she said sincerely. "You saidâ€| you said I have a brother. What is he like?"

Cinder was immediately saddened, and he struggled with how to break the news to her. "Shade. He was the best, he always spent time with me after my parents were killed. He was never mean to me, he never put me down or made me feel bad about the face thing." Skygge/Lightning looked mildly confused at this, but Toothless just nodded, understanding.

The young Night Fury kept speaking. "He was the clan leader, before Brannâ€|" He didn't know how to continue, but an expression of dawning horror was growing on her face.

"What happened to Shade?" she whispered.

"Heâ€| Brann killed him."

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning couldn't remember having a brother but Cinder's words shocked her all the same.<p>

"Brannâ€| killed my brother?"

Cinder scowled and spat, "Like a coward. Like a filthy snake. He didn't challenge Shade, he snuck up on him while he was sleeping and killed him and his mate, Stella." The young dragon swallowed, seemingly holding back a tide of emotion. "The next morning, Brann announced to all of us that he was our new leader, and that things were going to be different from then on. Shade's death was only the beginning."



All her suspicions about Brann were correct. He was a monster, who had killed her family and had imposed his rule on innocent dragons. "What else has he done?" Lightning wasn't sure she wanted to know, but she knew it was important to learn as much as possible about her old life.

"He slaughtered almost all of the Elders. He hurts innocent dragons, adults who have done nothing wrong and hatchlings who don't know any better. We live in fear of him and his vicious friends."

"Other Night Furies willingly serve him?"

"No. I don't know what kind of dragons they are. They look like big snakes with legs, and they are as evil as Brann is. They carry out all of his bidding, and the rest of us are forced to obey him or be killed, or worse."

Lightning didn't like the way the young dragon had said, "or worse." Noticing the scar across one of his large, silvery green eyes, she couldn't help but ask. "Who did that to you?"

Cinder looked sad. "Brann beat me up pretty badly when I wouldn't shoot dragons out of the sky."

\_What? \_She exchanged a shocked glance with Toothless. "When you wouldn't \_what?\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"Brann sometimes makes the dragons he feels like punishing fly in the air for hours. He won't let them land. Instead he has his dragons shoot at them until they can't get out of the way fast enough."<p>

"And he made \_you \_do this?"

"My blasts are really strong for my age." Whatever pride he had once felt at the distinction had long been replaced with fear and sometimes self-loathing. "I tried not to hit them, I really did. But I'm not good at aiming yet, so sometimes I guessed wrong, and sometimes dragons got hurtâ€¦" he trailed off on a whisper, looking stricken, and buried his face in his front paws.

\_Show no weakness. Show no weakness. Show noâ€¦ \_Cinder heard the cell door open with a creak. Without warning something warm wrapped around him and pulled him close.

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning couldn't resist. Before Toothless could say anything, she opened the cage and crept inside. The small dragon looked even smaller up close, curled up in the middle of the cold stone floor. Without speaking, she laid down, curling her body around his and pulling him in closer with her foreleg.<p>

She saw him look up, startled, and stare at her incredulously from within her embrace. A second passed before his small face crumpled, eyes squeezing shut, and he buried his head against her chest, whimpering.

"Shh, it'll be alright," Lightning soothed, stroking his back with one paw, and she looked up to see Toothless watching the scene with a strange expression on his face. She was about to defend herself when she finally translated his expression. \_No, not strange\_ it was a look of pure, unfiltered adoration.

Something fluttered in her chest at the sight of her mate gazing upon her so lovingly. They remained that way for a little while, Toothless and Lightning looking into each other's eyes as Lightning held the distressed young Night Fury close.

Finally Cinder seemed to gather himself, and with a deep breath he pulled free of her loose hold and looked at her face. "Your name isn't really Lightning."

She smiled at him. "It is now."

Smiling back shyly, he said, "Okay," before turning to look at Toothless. "Are you going to leave me now?"

Toothless appeared to consider his words. "Actually, no. How would you like to come see the village with us?"

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder blinked as his eyes slowly adjusted to the bright sunlight after being in the dim jail for so long. What he saw astounded him.<p>

When he had attacked the village, he had spent no time actually \_looking \_at it, just firing at whatever unpopulated areas he could find. Now that he was on the ground, not fighting for his life, he could actually see Berk as its inhabitants did, and he couldn't stop his jaw from dropping.

Humans were everywhere. But so were dragons, perched on rooftops or following the humans around, carrying heavy loads, being petted and fed and loved by their riders. Now that it was mid-morning, almost all of the villagers were out and about, and the sounds and smells and sights of the marketplace were almost more than Cinder could handle.

\_Wow.\_ He heard Toothless laugh from where the older dragon stood beside him and he looked up, to see Toothless looking down at him with a wide smile. "It's a lot, isn't it?"

\_Yeah.\_ Cinder didn't answer, he just looked back out with wide eyes. "Come on," Toothless said and the three Night Furies moved away from the jail at a meandering pace, Cinder in the middle.

As they walked, more and more humans and dragons took notice of them, pointing and whispering, until a crowd had formed around them and they found they couldn't walk any farther. This made Cinder increasingly nervous, and he looked at Toothless to ask if he should go back to the jail, but stopped at the irritation on the older Night Fury's face.

"What's going on?" a voice shouted, and a disturbance rippled through the crowd as someone pushed their way through the throng of hulking

Vikings and dragons. Cinder watched with growing apprehension until a relatively small, slim human broke free of the crowd, dusting off his strange clothes. When he caught sight of Cinder, he grinned broadly, then turned back to the press of humans and shouted, "What, you've never seen a Night Fury before? Go back to your errands and leave them in peace. You'll get your chance to meet our guest soon enough."

Grumbling, mass of Vikings slowly turned and trickled away, leaving their dragons staring at Cinder, some curiously, and some malevolently. Cinder gulped. Next to him, Toothless growled, and shouted, "You heard Hiccup! Get out of here!"

Hiccup? Cinder didn't have long to wonder before the slender human approached their trio. "Hey, guys!" Without warning, Toothless left Cinder's side and bounded over to the human, and Cinder nervously pressed closer to Lightning, glancing up at her. But she was smiling, so he swallowed his apprehension. Looking back he saw Toothless rubbing his head against the human, who was laughing and scratching the dragon's neck. The man's eyes met Cinder's stare and crinkled with a smile, and Cinder shyly dropped his gaze.

"So this is our little incendiary landscaper!" Glancing up he saw the human approaching in a crouch, holding his hand out in front of him. "You sure gave us a fright, but it was pretty good practice for us. We've gotten pretty lazy in the past few years," he laughed, still coming closer. "Plus you gave us an excuse to renovate some of our older buildings. Gone are the days of rebuilding twice a month." The human was rambling, but it was starting to put Cinder at ease.

Finally the man stopped a couple of feet in front of him, still holding out his hand. "I won't hurt you," he said encouragingly. "I'm Hiccup, Toothless's human."

This was Toothless's human?! Well, Cinder didn't know what he had been expecting. In his experience, most humans were large and clumsy, but this Hiccup was slimmer and oddly more graceful, despite his metal leg.

Leaning in, he sniffed Hiccup's outstretched hand, then curiously leaned down and sniffed his prosthetic. More seriously, the human said, "I got that fighting the Red Death. I was lucky Toothless decided to come back for me, right, bud?" He started laughing again as Toothless's large black head came in to nuzzle his shoulder, purring loudly. "You just couldn't save all of me, could you? Had to make it even?"

Cinder was flabbergasted by this display. Toothless had sounded like he was fond of his human, but he had never shown his obvious adoration. Noticing his stare, Hiccup and Toothless disengaged and refocused on him.

Hiccup held out his hand again, still smiling. "You sure are a fierce opponent! Toothless, does he have a name?" Toothless nodded firmly, before backing up. He breathed a small stream of fire onto the ground, letting it smolder, before gesturing at it with his paw. Cinder watched curiously as Hiccup pondered his dragon's communication, trying to guess his name. "Ember?" Toothless shook his head. "Ash?" All three of the Night Furies shook their head at that.

"Hmmâ€¦| "

Toothless backed up again and began scratching in the dirt with one claw, before sitting back to inspect his handiwork. Hiccup, Lightning and Cinder leaned over to see what he had drawn. It was a simple curved line. The dragons had no idea what it was, but all of the blood seemed to drain from Hiccup's face as he stared at his dragon, astonished. "C?" he whispered. Toothless nodded before pointing at the smoldering patch of dirt next to them. The human looked up, thinking hard.

"Cinder?" They all nodded. "Toothless, you can write?!" Toothless looked sheepish before shaking his head. Hiccup didn't look like he believed him, but that was a conversation for later. "Whatever you sayâ€¦| "

"So, Cinder," Hiccup said conversationally, turning back and crouching again. "You must have flown a long time to get here!" Cinder nodded timidly, still keeping his distance. "I promise I'm not going to bite," the human sounded exasperated, but he was smiling. Leaving one hand out, Hiccup reached his other into a pocket on the side of his leather outfit and pulled out a sprig of green something.

Next to him, Lightning stood up and darted over to Hiccup, sniffing wildly and looking extremely pleased. Now alone, Cinder watched nervously as the human gently pushed her away, laughing, "No, this is for Cinder!"

Then the scent reached him. \_What on earth is that? \_It was the greatest smell he had ever encountered in his short life. Unable to resist, he slowly made his way to Hiccup's outstretched hand, until he was within reach of the human.

"Come on," crooned Hiccup. "You can't resist a little dragon nip, can you?"

Finally, Cinder allowed the tip of his nose to make contact with Hiccup's knuckles. The human waited a moment, before slooowly twisting his hand to rub the dragon nip on Cinder's black scales.

\_Oooooohhhhhh myyyyyyyâ€¦| \_Cinder's eyes rolled back in his head and he collapsed on his back, tongue lolling out as Hiccup rubbed under his chin and along his neck. Suddenly the human stopped, and disappointed, Cinder peered up at him to see an expression of concern on Hiccup's face.

"Your side!"

\_Oh. \_Cinder started getting to his feet, keeping his hurt side out of sight. But it was too late, Hiccup had seen it. "No, let me see it! We need to put something on that burn, Cinder," he said sternly. "I think we should go see Gobber. He'll know what to do."

\_Gobber? \_The name sounded sort of frightening. As though this Viking had a habit of devouring his opponents. But Cinder didn't have a chance to object, and was herded along by Toothless and Lightning to a place they called \_The Forge.\_

Cinder heard the off-key singing from up the street, accompanied by the clangs of a hammer. His apprehension growing, he tried to evade the prodding of the older Night Furies and slip through their legs, to no avail. Hiccup, noticing this, laughed. "Gobber's even more of a softy than I am when it comes to dragons. Don't worry, Cinder, he won't hurt you."

\_Well, if Hiccup thought it was safeâ€¦| \_

"Gobber!" Hiccup yelled as they approached. "We have a patient for you!"

A loud voice echoed from within the forge, "Can i' wait?"

"Nope!"

"Fine!"

A few loud crashes later, an enormous Viking stepped out into the sunlight, peering at Cinder. Cinder couldn't help but stare right back. His long, braided mustache went all the way to his chest, and he was missing an arm and a leg. Where his hand should be was a wicked looking axe, and Cinder swallowed nervously.

"Ahhh, so \_this \_is our little demolisher. Nice to finally meet ye," the Viking said, and Cinder wasn't so sure that this \_Gobber \_really found his presence pleasing.

"His name is Cinder," Hiccup interjected, sparing Cinder more awkward eye contact with the mustached Viking. "His side is wounded. I think he was beat up pretty badly in the skirmish a few days ago."

"Ye know what \_else \_was beaten up pretty badly with the arrival of a strange, hostile Night Fury?"

"Please don't say your undies."

"Besides those. No, I'd say the whole village took a fair poundin' along with your Cinder here. In fact, my roof caught fire, leavin' a hole through which a flock of Terrible Terrors crawled, settin' up house in my rafters, eatin' my fish when I'm no' lookin', and wakin' me up at the crack o' dawn with their horrible shriekin'!" Gobber finished with a shout, axe-hand pointed at Cinder.

Hiccup couldn't contain a snort of amusement at the concept of Gobber calling anyone's singing terrible when it was \_his \_tuneless hollering that tended to disturb the village most mornings.

Gobber seemed to follow his train of thought perfectly and scowled, before relaxing and letting loose a belly laugh. "Fine then. Let's have a look-see at our little Night Fury friend here."

\* \* \*

><p>About an hour later, Cinder had a fresh bandage and some salve on his burned side, and was relaxing on top of a mostly uncluttered table. The small dragon had been pleasantly surprised at Gobber's gentle treatment and knowledgeable care. Cinder had also been introduced to Grump, who had stirred from his nap long enough to

blink in acknowledgment at him, and he had learned all about the saddles and various killing instruments Gobber spent his time developing.<p>

Now, he watched as the old blacksmith tapped a sharp silver tooth into the left head of a purple Zippleback by the name of Flower. The right head, Bill, chatted animatedly with Toothless about his favorite types of fish (halibut taking the gold in that fierce competition) while Lightning pretended to doze off in the shade to avoid conversations with curious dragons.

Hiccup and Gobber did an excellent job of shooin' most other humans and dragons away from the forge, which, according to Grump, was unusual, given the high number of orders placed on a regular basis for saddles, weapons, limbs, and other sundries.

But most interestingly and importantly, Cinder had learned that a) slim and unthreatening Hiccup was in fact the Viking Chief and b) Toothless, whom Cinder was beginning to find himself rather attached to, was not just the leader of the dragons on Berk, he was an \_Alpha. \_Which excited and alarmed Cinder to no end. \_How does one behave around an Alpha? Do I have to call him "Alpha" now? How do I address Lightning, if she is his mate?\_

Cinder's musings were interrupted by none other than the Alpha himself. "How are you feeling?" the older dragon asked.

"Um&#128;" Cinder didn't know how to respond in a respectful way. "Good, sir?"

"Sir?"

"Yes, well, I mean, Alph-"

Toothless cut him off with a fierce glare. "Don't call me Alpha."

"Okay!" Cinder quickly agreed, unnerved by Toothless's sudden severity.

The larger Night Fury seemed to soften. "Call me Toothless. The Alpha thing&#128; isn't important, and it shouldn't change the way you see me."

A soft \_thump \_was their only warning before a deep, commanding voice interrupted. "Shouldn't it, though?"

Toothless and Cinder looked up, surprised, to see a large male Stormcutter watching them through one of the open windows.

"No," said Toothless, quickly becoming annoyed again.

"I think it should," said the Stormcutter, "after all, you defeated a Bewilderbeast after challenging him to protect your human. Granted, he was evil and twisted, but even I, who have known my human far longer than you have known yours, would never have dared to attempt such a feat. It is our \_honor \_to call you Alpha, for sparing us allegiance to a corrupt giant and his sinister, depraved human master."

Cinder had no idea what a Bewilderbeast was, but it sounded even more frightening than a Monstrous Nightmare. And the way this Stormcutter was talking, Toothless had defeated an even more evil dragon than the Red Death.

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless was about to respond when Cinder excitedly butted in. "What is a Bewilderbeast? Was he bigger than the Red Death? How did you defeat him?" Obviously, he wanted another story, and an amused Cloudjumper wasn't going to be any help.<p>

"Oh, it's an excellent tale," Cloudjumper said to the excited young Night Fury. "By the way, I am Cloudjumper. Who do I have the pleasure of speaking to?"

Cinder puffed up. "I'm Cinder," he said importantly.

"Well, Cinder, you certainly caused quite a stir with your arrival." Turning back to Toothless, he continued. "Well, Alpha Toothless? I think we are all waiting for a story."

Looking out, Toothless noticed that a small crowd of dragons had gathered curiously behind Cloudjumper, who was pressed as closely as possible to the side of the structure, his tail flicking back and forth. Next to him, looking alert and excited on the tabletop, lay Cinder, his eyes wide. \_Great, \_he sighed to himself.\_ It's story time.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I dedicate this chapter to my dog, who my family and I had to put to sleep today. He has been quite an inspiration for some of my characters in this fic, which is why I bring it up.<strong>

\*\*Cancer is a disease that harms more than just its victims. Entire families suffer when one member has any form of it. My family has had more than our fair share of it surrounding us in recent years and I just wanted to say that it's painful for everyone involved, but you can find support in the most unlikely of places. We'll love you and miss you and remember you always, bud.\*\*

## 25. Chapter 22

\*\*Hi guys :) we're at more than 5,700 views now. How neat!\*\*

\*\*So, I tried to figure out a way to \_not \_do this chapter, but decided to just get it over with. If you've seen the second movie (just like the chapter about the first movie) you don't need to read the entire thing if you don't feel like it. (There's some stuff at the end, though, so don't skip it completely!)\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"Gobber! I almost forgot!" Hiccup exclaimed, oblivious to the gathering of dragons outside the forge. "I had this idea for the new house. Get this- I'll create a pipeline from the well to the ground floor, and install a pump so thatâ€¦|"<p>

Gobber listened to his old apprentice incredulously. "What, you mean like \_running water\_?"

"Exactly! I was thinking if it works in Astrid's and my house, we could try connecting \_other \_homes to the wells, so everyone could have a clean source of water right at their fingertips!"

"An' just what's wrong wi' goin' to the well for water?" But Hiccup was already dragging Gobber from the forge, walking eagerly in the direction of his house-in-progress at the top of the hill. Neither of them noticed the dragons settling in on the rooftops, lounging on the ground, and clustering up next to the forge.

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning listened eagerly to hear Toothless's recounting of the events that had taken place just over a year ago. Meatlug had given her a rundown of the story, but she wanted to hear it directly from her mate, who was generally reluctant to discuss anything to do with his being Alpha.<p>

It was quite an adventure, and most of the dragons hadn't been present for all of it, so it was even more exciting than hearing Toothless recount his first meeting with Hiccup to the defeat of the Red Death.

\* \* \*

><p>Shifting uncomfortably under the intense gazes of the eager dragons gathered around him, Toothless cleared his throat. "Well, where do I start?"<p>

Flower piped up, sort of lisping around his new tooth. "Well, we never really heard about what happened right before Valka and Cloudjumper found you."

"How about the part where we dragged you back to our Alpha's sanctuary after hauling you out of the ocean!" one larger individual shouted, to the amusement of the other dragons.

"No! Start at the dragon race!" Toothless could see that the suggestion had come from a preening Stormfly, who obviously wanted to hear a recounting about how she and Astrid had won the race before flying off to find Hiccup and himself.

"Fine, fine," Toothless lifted a paw, and the crowd fell silent.

"Hiccup and I were practicing solo gliding when-"

"What's solo gliding?"

"Do you want to hear the story or not?" Toothless snapped.

"Well, soooooorrryyyyy!"

"Anyways. You know how half of my tailfin is a prosthetic. Well, Hiccup developed a fin that would stay in place for gliding purposes, since I had previously destroyed the one he made for me so that I



could fly on my own-

"Why'd you do \_that?\_"

"Seriously?! Okay!" Toothless quickly recounted the story of the first Snoggletog he and Hiccup had shared, and how he had used the independent tail to retrieve Hiccup's helmet from the bottom of the ocean, while Hiccup had somehow managed to end up on the nesting island, while Astrid blew up half the village with dragon eggs. The dragons laughed hysterically, "aww"ing at the appropriate hatchling-related moments. "After all that, I purposely broke the tail so that Hiccup and I could fly together, as the team we had become."

After another chorus of "awww", then Toothless waved for them all to quiet down. "Okay, shut up! Now, may I please continue?"

After briefly describing how Stormfly and Astrid had dramatically won the dragon race with their capture of the black sheep (having heard the story from the blue Nadder many times), Toothless explained to those oblivious dragons who had not yet noticed the insanity that was Hiccup's experimentation with human flight. "After we crashed, \_again,\_ he and I wrestled bitterly for dominance before Stormfly showed up. Then she and I battled ferociously over a log, while Hiccup and Astrid flirted in their strange human way."

He described seeing smoke in the distance, flying through a black forest of charred trees, before coming across a dragon trapping outpost, completely destroyed by giant spears of ice. "The trappers attacked us, hitting Stormfly with a net." After hearing disturbing news about a mysterious dragon rider and a man creating a dragon army, fighting off the desperate trappers and returning to Berk, he and Hiccup promptly left once more, rather than be grounded with the other dragons by Chief Stoick. Stoick had wanted to protect Berk from the man creating the dragon army, the evil Drago Bludvist.

"Don't forget that Astrid and I followed you!" called Stormfly.

"And Astrid and Stormfly followed us. We flew out and found the same trappers on their ship!" When Toothless described how Hiccup willingly surrendered to the trappers, the dragons let loose a chorus of "What?!"s and "Why?!"s.

Then, after Stoick and Hiccup's friends attempted to rescue them, he and Toothless had taken off, searching for Drago Bludvist, murderer and dragon trapper. "Stoick told us about how Drago had killed an entire hall full of people with his armored dragons," at this some of the dragons looked ashamed, for either they or a dragon they knew had been a part of that slaughter. "-and Hiccup believed that if he could talk to Drago, he could change his mind about creating the dragon army. You all know how stubborn Hiccup can be."

"Oh, and you can't?" A voice called, immediately lightening the mood.

Toothless had to chuckle at that, but quickly became serious again. "Hiccup and I flew for a while above the clouds as the sun set. Then, I heard something unusual approaching from below the clouds, and without warning a figure clad in strange armor appeared, seemingly floating alongside us as we flew. The person slipped below the clouds

again and I slowed, nervous. Then, with a loud roar, a great four-winged dragon burst from the clouds ahead of us, turning to face us as his rider pointed a staff at us. Of course, I was not frightened in the slightest." Toothless leaned in conspiratorially, as though about to tell a secret. "Little did I know, though, just how strange that dragon would turn out to be."

"Who are you calling strange?" Cloudjumper growled in mock outrage.

"Excuse me, I believe I am still telling my story, so if you wouldn't mind—" Toothless said sweetly. Cloudjumper grumbled but remained quiet.

"Anyways. This mysterious rider called upon a group of dragons, who grabbed Hiccup off my back, leaving me unable to fly. Falling from the sky, all I could do was watch as they took my human, until I crashed through the ice into the frozen sea. I desperately tried to fly after them, leaping from the water again and again, until, exhausted, I was pulled beneath the surface by enormous sea dragons."

Toothless described waking up to being carried, then deposited in a strange ice cave where Hiccup was trapped by a large crowd of dragons and the mysterious dragon rider. "The rider did something with his hand and I passed out, obviously with dignity, unfortunately leaving Hiccup to the stranger's mercy. While I was out it was discovered that not only was the rider not a he, she was also Hiccup's long lost mother, Valka. It turned out that she had not been killed in a dragon raid twenty years before, but was actually carried off by a certain Stormcutter, and since then had been rescuing dragons and harboring them in this enormous ice cave."

Many "Ah"s filtered through the crowd, some from dragons who had witnessed the reunion, and some from dragons who never really had figured out where all these new dragons had come from.

Then Toothless came to the part about the first Bewilderbeast, the benevolent white Alpha of Valka's sanctuary. "It was he who had created this enormous space, and he who protected the dragons. I never dreamed of a dragon larger than the Red Death, but this Bewilderbeast dwarfed the Queen, and I was just thankful I wouldn't have to fight anything close to his size." At this, some of the dragons exchanged knowing glances.

"We went out, supposedly to find food, following closely behind Cloudjumper and Valka, with all of the dragons from the sanctuary behind us. At first we hovered over the sea, and nothing happened. Without warning the Alpha burst from the water, mouth filled with fish, and with one breath blew them all into the air. It was raining fish!" Toothless exclaimed. "I have experienced very few things more marvelous than that in my life, only a few—" and with that he looked down at Lightning and winked at her, causing her to stare at the ground between her paws with just a little embarrassment.

"There is a cliff where the wind currents blow up its face so powerfully that all you have to do is spread your wings and it suspends you in the air. Valka hopped from dragon to dragon, and once she was back on Cloudjumper, Hiccup just had to show off his flight suit. So he opened it up and jumped off my back, forcing me to follow

him. Human flight is all well and good until the human is about to hit something. Which is generally what happens every time Hiccup tries it. So he was about to crash when I grabbed him, and we landed in the snow. I panicked a little when I realized I wasn't holding him, but he popped up next to me, saying something like "We almost had it that time!" Well, we almost "have it" \_every \_time. So I swept his legs out from under him and he fell back into the snow. Cloudjumper and Valka landed nearby, and instead of scolding him like a mother should, she \_marveled \_at his suit! Flight suit. Should be called 'Danger to everyone within reach suit.'" Toothless grumbled, to the amusement of the other dragons, who, while they adored Hiccup, were grateful that their own riders had lessâ€| inventive and adrenaline-seeking tendencies.

"Valka pressed a point on my neck and the spines on my back split into two parts, which I could open and close for better maneuverability in the air. I had no idea!" With that he opened them and flapped them open and shut, showing off. Neither Cinder nor Lightning had known they could do this, and the younger dragon, amazed, concentrated as hard as he could on his back, trying to get them to open, to no avail.

"We returned to the sanctuary, taking in the amazing sight of all the dragons in their safe haven. Hiccup was telling me that it was time to keep traveling and find Drago, when all of a sudden a massive figure grabbed him from behind and dragged him back out the way we had come in. It was Chief Stoick, with Gobber, come to take Hiccup home. We were almost out when Gobber froze, and suggested that Stoick "might want to take this one." Hiccup, Gobber and I peered through the crack we were in to see Stoick drop his sword at the sight of Valka, his wife, the woman he had believed to be dead for twenty years."

Quickly, Toothless talked about the family reunion, complete with singing and dancing, then Valka's agreeing to return to Berk with them. "Suddenly a loud crash echoed through the sanctuary, and panicked, we ran out to see that an enormous fleet of ships floated just offshore, and a massive army of men and dragons had gathered on the icy shore. It was Drago. We thought he was there to find Valka, but he had a far darker purpose than we could have imagined." Toothless couldn't help his scowl, and the dragons shifted nervously.

\* \* \*

><p>Cloudjumper listened to Toothless describe how the dragons of the sanctuary had bravely defended their home, and how Stormfly and the others with their riders had burst from some of Drago's traps, joining the fray. Dragons fought dragons, their wills bent by Drago." Many dragons looked downcast at this, remembering the fear of living in Drago's army. "Then Valka appeared, leading the great Alpha to destroy the invaders.<p>

"But that was just what Drago wanted. He began to shout, deep, harsh, guttural cries, summoning his secret weapon. From the depths of the sea rose a dark challenger: another Bewilderbeast."

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder's eyes were almost popping out of his head as Toothless

described the battle between the two Bewilderbeasts, untilâ€|<p>

"The Alpha of the sanctuary fell, killed by the other, monstrous Bewilderbeast. Under Drago's control, the new Alpha wasted no time asserting his dominance over all of the dragons of the sanctuary, and powerless to resist, they flocked to him."

There was a palpable sadness in the air, as dragons remembered the death of their beloved white Alpha, then the blur of forced allegiance. Cinder glanced at Cloudjumper, who looked almost forlorn. But that wasn't the end of it.

"Hiccup tried reasoning with the madman, to no avail. I was forced to submit to the Bewilderbeast, and in my blindness, Drago ordered the Alpha to force me to kill Hiccup."

Cinder was shocked. \_Hiccup was alive\_. \_How had he survived? When did Toothless defeat the Bewilderbeast?\_

"I remember nothing, only the bloodlust of the Alpha. I suppose I charged my blast, to obliterate my rider. I fired once. But when I was released, when Drago was satisfied by the result, when I saw what I had doneâ€|"

No one moved, or even breathed. Some of the dragons had some idea of what had transpired, but it wasn't a story that anyone ever spoke of. Cinder and Lightning were leaning in, unblinking, anxious to hear what had happened.

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless looked up, his view of the sky blocked by the roof of the forge. With a sigh, he continued. "I was under the control of the Alpha. I was not myself, I could not have resisted. But that doesn't mean I don't blame myself every day for it. I had not hit Hiccup. No, at the last minute, Stoick had leapt in and shoved his son out of the way. So, instead of killing my humanâ€|" Toothless paused, and took a deep breath. "I killed his father, with the cold will of the Alpha coursing through my veins."<p>

If dragons could cry, there wouldn't be a single dry eye in the crowd. While it had taken the previous Chief time to adjust to the dragons after Hiccup had made peace with them, Stoick had always been openminded and fair to them all, even when they inadvertently caused mayhem and destruction, as large, deadly, firebreathing creatures tend to do.

"When I came to, when I realized what had happened, I went forward, desperately hoping that I had not killed the loving if sometimes frustrating father of my human. His armor had held, but the force of the blast had thrown him backwards, smashing him into a wall of ice, and crushing him. Hiccup, when he saw me, pushed me away, unable to forgive me for what I had done. So I ranâ€| until the Alpha summoned us all, to make our way to Berk with him and bring about its destruction."

"As you know, I cannot fly without a rider, well, when I'm not wearing this," Toothless waved his tailfin. "Drago saw this, and hauling me down, rode on my back to Berk."

"I functioned mindlessly under Alpha's command for an indeterminable length of time. The next thing I remember is Hiccup's voice, piercing through the fog. I saw his face, close to mine, telling me that it wasn't my fault, that I was his best friend. Somehow I knew I had to fight, to resist. The Alpha turned and focused all of his power on me, and I wrestled with his will, refusing to give in, for my best friend, untilâ€¦ I was free. Drago saw this and hit me with his staff, but I grabbed it and flipped him off of my back."

Some of the dragons let out small cheers, but Toothless held up a paw. "I fell and Hiccup leapt off of the baby dragon that had carried him from the sanctuary to Berk. At the last possible moment- as usual- he made it onto my back and we were flying together again. Hiccup reached out and tore off a piece of a tattered flag, asking me to trust him. He blindfolded me to protect me from the influence of the Alpha, and together we flew straight at the dark Bewilderbeast. I almost hit Drago, who laughed when I missed him, until he saw that Hiccup was no longer on my back. Hiccup used his ridiculous flight suit to glide right next to the Alpha's head, releasing some of the Zippleback gas and lighting the trail to explode across the Bewilderbeast's face. I circled back, catching him right as he was about to fly into the spines on the back of the Bewilderbeast. Another last-minute rescue. It was just like when we flew up the back of the Red Death as she crashed, only this time we were determined \_not \_to hit the massive dragon's tail."

Toothless yawned, realizing how late in the afternoon it was. Looking out, he could see passing humans glancing curiously at the crowd of dragons around the forge, but wrote it off as just another mystery for Fishlegs and Hiccup. Since that new Night Fury arrived, they had noticed an increasing number of mysterious behaviors from the dragons, but what could they do?

"We made it, diving down to where Drago had fallen. Hiccup jumped from my back and threw his fire sword, nearly slicing off the madman's hand as he cut him off from his staff. It was over, or so we thought. Turning, we saw the great Bewilderbeast inhale, then spray his icy breath directly at us. I barely leapt on top of Hiccup in time as it froze around us, trapping us.

"Something snapped inside of me. It was bad enough that this creature had taken my will from me, bad enough that it had forced me to murder the Viking Chief, but now it had directly attempted to kill Hiccup, and I'd had enough. Somehow, I began to glow, filling myself with an energy I have never felt before, until the ice around us shattered into a cloud of snowy fragments.

"I was furious, roaring my defiance. I looked at Hiccup for his approval, which he gave, before jumping up onto one of the icy spikes left by the Bewilderbeast's attack on the village. I blasted his face, once, twiceâ€¦ I lost count. All of you," Toothless gestured out at the gathered dragons, "broke free of the Alpha's will, leaving his side to fly behind me. At some point, Drago leapt up from the ground to climb up to the Alpha's face. You fired, endless shots, blinding the Bewilderbeast. Enraged, he reared back, about to breathe his ice on us, when I charged up the most powerful blast I have ever let loose. It struck the left tusk of the Bewilderbeast, breaking it off of his face. The massive spear fell and crashed to the ground, signaling his defeat. I roared, screaming with a dominance and fury I

did not know I possessed. With a subdued roar, he turned and crashed back into the sea, taking Drago with him.

"You know the rest. In the wreckage, you acknowledged me as Alpha and the humans acknowledged Hiccup as Chief. We hung the tusk in the Great Hall. And so it has been, for the past year, as we have rebuilt and grown stronger than we ever were before."

For a moment, there wasn't a sound. Toothless looked around, disconcerted. Then a loud cheer broke from the dragons, as they roared their continued approval and gratitude for what he had done. While self-conscious on the inside, Toothless knew it was important for him to appear strong and confident to keep the trust and good faith of his dragons, so he sat tall, allowing their praise to wash over him for the moment.

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder was speechless. That story wasâ€¦ epic. Toothless was a little more than twice his age, yet he had done more than most dragons could ever even imagine doing in a lifetime. At that moment, Cinder knew that if anyone could help him free Ash, and maybe even defeat Brann, it would be Toothless.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning, too, was blown away. Toothless was the <em>Alpha. <em>She understood that he held the ultimate authority among the dragons, but she had never imagined what had brought him to do it, to fight a Bewilderbeast and win, for the sake of someone he loved. It was in that moment that she began to feel very special, yet more than a little unworthy of her mate. \_What have I done to deserve him?

—

Lost in her thoughts, she didn't notice Toothless approach her until he gently nuzzled her jaw, whispering, "Let's go to the meadow later." A warmth filled her chest, but before she could respond he was swept away by a tide of excited dragons, as though he had defeated the Bewilderbeast all over again.

By the time the square had calmed and most of the dragons had returned to their routines, the sun was setting. Lightning lounged in the forge, half listening to Cinder excitedly go on about how incredible Toothless was, since she absolutely agreed with that judgment. Cloudjumper ambled over, coming as close as he could without smacking his head against the roof of the forge. "So, you never really knew what happened to make him Alpha," he rumbled.

Lightning was unsure of how to answer. She never really had the chance to speak to the Stormcutter, only knowing that Toothless held him in the highest regard. "Not really, no. He doesn't like to talk about it, so I'm surprised he was willing to share the entire story today."

"I thinkâ€¦ it wasn't an arbitrary decision. I think he did it forâ€¦" he trailed off, tapping a claw in the direction of a quickly-fading Cinder, who was still mumbling about Toothless and evil dragons.

Lightning considered this. Her mate had once mentioned that he wasn't very good with young dragons, but it seemed to her that he had gained the trust and devotion of one particular shy young Night Fury. The warmth returned to her chest as she thought of Toothless surrounded by hatchling Night Furies. \_Their \_hatchlings.

\_Best not bring that up just yetâ€¦ he's got enough on his plate. \_But still she couldn't shake the image of Toothless as a father, and she couldn't suppress the strange joy the thought brought her.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Phew! That took me quite a while. I had to re-watch the second movie to try and fit in the more important details. Anyways, more action to come in the next few chapters! Stay tuned :)<strong>

## 26. Chapter 23

The next few days flew by in a blur. Cinder stayed up in the shelter with Lightning and Toothless as his side healed, and he plotted how to get his sister back. Toothless suspected what might be on the young dragon's mind but said nothing, figuring that Cinder would speak when he was ready.

Lightning spent more time down at the Academy, simply observing. She refused to be ridden, not out of fear or distaste, but because it just didn't seem right for her. She was devoted to her mate, and in her eyes there was no room for a human partner as well. No one, dragon or human, questioned her decision, although many villagers looked on enviously as they watched her fly riderless alongside Toothless with Hiccup on his back. \_What would it be like to fly on a Night Fury?\_ Some found the idea too stimulating to tolerate, while others wondered how they could work up the courage to ask their Chief for a ride.

Cinder was also introduced to some of the other dragons, although Toothless made sure that the rest kept their distance to avoid overwhelming the young Night Fury. Among the first to meet him were Stormfly, Hookfang, Barf and Belch, and Meatlug.

The small dragon was very eager to meet types of dragons that were not native to where he came from, and was partially in awe of Hookfang when he discovered that the red dragon was a Monstrous Nightmare. This inflated Hookfang's already swollen ego, untilâ€¦| "Are you the Nightmare that Toothless fought to protect Hiccup?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Did he really beat you in a minute?"

Grumbling, Hookfang looked off to the side. "Something like that."

"I think you're pretty scary," Cinder said, trying to flatter the Nightmare back into a good mood.

It worked. "Really?"

"Oh, definitely. Night Furies are scary because they are mysterious, but you're frightening without trying. You burst into flames! I wish I could do that!"

Appeased, Hookfang smiled. \_He was really starting to like this kid\_.

The others quickly fell under the young dragon's spell, too. Cinder was charming without being deceitful or manipulative, and he was just so adorable with his enormous silvery green eyes. Of course, Toothless still maintained those traits to some degree, but they were used to their Alpha by now. This little Night Fury was new, and exciting. The other dragons soon drew him out of his shell, and were as delighted with him as he was with them. They encouraged him to fly, and to practice firing shots with targets set up in the arena, where it was safe. He quickly became more than proficient at aiming, and controlling the strength of his blasts.

"That was excellent!" shouted Barf as Cinder obliterated yet another barrel.

"Do another!" called Belch.

Meatlug tried to intervene, but Cinder laughed and said, "Okay, just one more."

Hookfang and Stormfly placed the targets into position, and Cinder took off, flying in circles around the arena, faster and faster until he was just a dark blur. The familiar whistling sound of an attacking Night Fury built until it filled the space, and just when it reached maximum volume Cinder banked left hard, flipped upside down, and fired once, twice, three times.

Each target burst apart in a flash of purple light, and the Zippleback heads cheered raucously as Cinder slowed and landed, bounding to a stop. The young dragon looked around and saw Lightning lounging in the entrance of the arena, and he smiled hopefully at her, seeking her approval. "Did you see me?" he called.

At his question she returned his smile. "It was excellent. Your aim is getting to be as good as Toothless's." In Cinder's eyes, there was no higher compliment. Grinning toothlessly, he bounced around, sniffing at the debris of the targets and leaping as far as he could without spreading his wings.

"He's really coming along, isn't he?" a voice said quietly in Lightning's ear, and she had to stop herself from jumping. Turning her head slightly, she met Toothless's eyes.

"You really shouldn't sneak up on other dragons like that."

"Sneak? I was practically stomping along, almost cracking the stone as I came down. It's not my fault you're half deaf," he teased her, running the tip of his tail along her spine. "I-"

"Toothless!"

He looked up as he heard his name, seeing Cinder bounding towards him with a goofy grin on his face. "Did you see? I blew up all the



targets and didn't miss once!"

"I didn't see, but I heard the explosions along with the rest of the village. I just came along to make sure we weren't under siege."

"Oh come off it, Toothless. We were just having fun!" Hookfang said snarkily.

Rather than becoming irritated, Toothless only grinned. "Maybe I want to have some fun, too!"

"You, have fun?" Hookfang replied skeptically. It had been quite a while since Toothless had been playful around them, and the Nightmare was curious as to how it would turn out.

"Yes, fun. For you see, as the Alpha, I always have to inspect and make sure we don't have any intruders sneaking around Berk. No troublemakers." Toothless purposely avoided looking at Cinder, walking in a circle around the smaller dragon, who watched him with eager curiosity and a tiny touch of nervousness. "But do you know what I have to do when I've found an enemy infiltrator?"

Playing along, Hookfang said, "No, I don't. What do you have to do?"

"First, I have to catch them!" And with a playful roar he pounced at Cinder, who barely scrambled out of the way in time. Toothless chased after him at a lazy speed, mock growling and pretending to be serious, as the smaller dragon shrieked and ran around. Finally Toothless leapt at him, gently trapping the young Night Fury beneath one paw.

"Do you know what I have to do once I've caught them?" he called out, pinning a squirming and giggling Cinder on the ground.

"No, Alpha, what do you do now?" Stormfly answered.

"I must fight them for dominance!" With that he released Cinder, who immediately popped up to his feet, looking a little worried. Toothless growled, not bothering to hide his smile, before beginning to circle the smaller dragon. "The opponents must circle each other, sizing up each other's strengths and weaknesses. Then they wait for the chance to strike!" Catching on, Cinder growled back, and matched Toothless's slow pace as they circled.

With what definitely had to be the cutest roar ever heard on Berk, Cinder pounced at Toothless, who let the smaller dragon push him onto his back as they rolled around. The other dragons watched this display, amazed and delighted. No one was more so than Lightning, who watched with that strange joy of what might be.

Toothless was on his back as Cinder jumped up and down on his chest, proclaiming his victory. Quietly he whispered, as though he were dying, leading Cinder to lean down closer to him. "But you must never celebrate your victory too soon, because the tables could turn in an instant!" he roared, leaping to his feet and trapping Cinder once again. "Once I have established my mastery, do you know what must be done?"

This time it was Meatlug who excitedly replied, "No, Alpha. What must

be done?"

"Well, you see, enemy spies often know all kinds of information that could prove invaluable to our cause. So once I've caught an enemy spy," Toothless said, holding down a desperately flailing Cinder, "I must get him to \_talk.\_"

He leered down menacingly at the smaller dragon, who shouted, "I'll never tell you anything!"

"Oh, but I have my ways of getting you to squeal." Toothless lifted one paw, claws extended, as though he were going to slash right through Cinder. The young Night Fury's eyes widened with fear, but he kept his mouth shut, determined not to squeal.

In a flash Toothless brought down his paw, but instead of cutting through Cinder, he began to tickle him mercilessly.

"AaaaaaAAAAAH!" Cinder cried out, desperately laughing and trying to breathe. "I'llâ€| neverâ€| talk!" he gasped, unable to escape the tickle assault but still determined not to give in.

He lasted less than thirty seconds. "Okay!" he wheezed. "I give up! Mercy! Meeeeercyyyyyy!" With that, he pretended to pass out.

Toothless couldn't contain his laughter, and fell down besides the still young Night Fury.

In his deepest, most threatening voice, Cinder intoned: "But you mustn't celebrate your victory too soon, forâ€|" Toothless knew what was coming. "â€| the tables could turn in an instant!" Suddenly full of energy once again, Cinder roared and leapt from the ground onto Toothless, starting the whole process over again as the other dragons looked on, filling the arena with laughter.

\* \* \*

><p>"Toothless?"<p>

"Yes?"

"I really like it here."

"I'm glad."

"Butâ€|"

"What is it?"

"I have to go back."

"Why?" Toothless kept his voice calm. He and Cinder were up on the cliff near the village, looking out over the ocean towards the setting sun.

"It's Ashâ€| I have to save her."

"I see."

They were silent for a moment, before Toothless continued.

"When were you planning on leaving?"

"Tomorrow morning. It's almost a three day flight, if the winds are with you and the sky is clear. If it's storming, wellâ€¦ I don't even know if it can be done. I barely made it over here under perfect conditions."

"And you were planning on going by yourself?"

"Yes. No. Wellâ€¦ I was hoping that you could come with me."

Toothless knew that this moment would come. He couldn't let an innocent hatchling suffer, not if he could do something about it. It might not be the time to liberate the entire clan of Night Furies, but a quiet extraction of Cinder's little sister could, in theory, be done.

"We'll have to leave before dawn."

"I- wait, what?"

"I said, we'll have to leave before dawn so that we have time to scout ahead and figure out a plan."

"Does that mean you're going to go with me?" Cinder couldn't contain the hope threading through his voice.

Toothless turned his head to look into the eyes of the trusting young dragon beside him. "Yes, Cinder. I'm going with you."

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless told Cinder to get some sleep in the shelter as he summoned his mate, along with his second-in-command. Lightning came first, immediately sensing that something was up. "What is it?" she asked, concerned.<p>

The last rays of the sun peeked over the horizon, streaking the sky with orange and yellow as the dark blue of night crept forth. Other dragons and humans were making their way back to their respective homes, whether it be houses, shelters next to the houses, random rooftops, or the large stable where un-partnered dragons resided.

Silently as a breath of wind, Cloudjumper landed near them. "What is it, Alpha?"

Quickly, Toothless explained to them that he was going with Cinder to rescue the young dragon's even younger sister, who was injured, and in danger. "We are going to leave in a few hours, so that we can arrive on the island late in the day to scout out a plan. As we fly, Cinder will tell me everything he knows about the island and the dragons who live there, including where he believes his sister is being held and how many dragons are loyal to Brann."

Immediately, Lightning spoke up. "I'm going with you."

"As am I," Cloudjumper added.

"No, you aren't."

"I definitely am. You're not leaving me here." said Lightning, her voice betraying her deep worry.

"No, Lightning. I need you and Cloudjumper to stay here and make sure everything is running smoothly on Berk. If something happens to us, you will at least be safe."

"No, Toothless, I-" Lightning started to argue but Toothless cut her off.

"Listen to me. I don't want to leave you here, but I can't constantly be terrified that something might happen to you on this mission. If I allow you to accompany us you will be in immediate danger, not just by being in the line of fire but by being something that Brann wants, enough to kill innocent dragons and humans for." He looked into her blue eyes pleadingly, willing her to understand.

She looked down, willing herself to remain calm. Glancing back up to look into his eyes, she whispered, "What if it helps me remember?"

He shut his eyes tight, knowing how she felt. "If I was convinced that a single journey would be enough to restore your memories, I would consider having you join us. As it is, I will not be responsible for taking you there, only to lose you. I couldn't bear it."

"I couldn't either, Toothless. You're all I have."

"That's not true," Toothless said. "You have all of Berk, now. An island full of good dragons and good people to support you and love you. Besides, who else could I trust to look after Hiccup while I'm gone? It will be less than a week. You might even enjoy having a little Tooth-less time."

Her insecurity flared, and she wanted to rage at him. The people and dragons of Berk were good and kind but she was a stranger in their midst, with what was beginning to look like a dark past. \_He couldn't leave her. \_Even though what he said made sense.

Finally, Cloudjumper spoke up. "Are you sure you would not like me to accompany you, Alpha?"

"Would you quit it with the- Yes, I'm sure. I imagine I might need you, but Berk needs you more. If something happens to me, you're the Alpha."

Cloudjumper looked like he wanted to argue as well, but wisely held his tongue.

"Well you can't just go alone!" cried Lightning.

"He won't be," a new voice said. Turning, they all saw Stormfly standing behind them.

"Listen, Stormfly-" started Toothless, but the Nadder cut him

off.

"You're going to need someone else. If it's true that Cinder's sister is injured, how are you going to get her back here? You're going to have to carry her, and you're going to need help doing it. And you don't have any idea what you're flying into! It could be a nest of hostile dragons who shoot first before asking questions. You \_need\_ at least one more dragon, and I volunteer. I also will follow you if you say no, so you might as well let me fly with you. I can keep up."

Toothless was slightly irritated, but he knew Stormfly had a point. "Fine. We leave before dawn. Go get some rest."

With a short nod the blue Nadder took off, heading for Astrid's house. Lightning, upset, gave Toothless one last glance before leaping up and flying towards the shelter at the top of the hill.

Cloudjumper looked as serious as Toothless had ever seen him. "Be careful, Toothless. Trust Cinder, he is the only one with any idea of what goes on there, and he is the only one who can lead you safely in and out. Speaking of Cinder, I doubt he will be strong enough to fly there and back with no rest in between. I know you're strong enough to carry him and his sister, but keep in mind that it could slow you down, so rely on Stormfly to help you."

"I will," Toothless said soberly. "I don't have a really bad feeling about this one, though. The last thing Brann and Flame will expect is for us to infiltrate their island and, well, dragon-nap a prisoner. We should be safe enough."

"One more thing, though," said Cloudjumper. "The dragons running that island are killers. They would not hesitate to kill you or Stormfly or even young Cinder. Are you willing to do the same in order to defend the dragons who follow you?"

Toothless considered it. "I don't like the thought of it. But I've killed dragons before," he said grimly, "and I'm willing to go beyond that, to any lengths, to protect my own."

"Very well." The Stormcutter nodded, as though he had been waiting to hear that answer. "You should rest as well, Toothless. I know that you can fly with minimal effort for as long as you will be, but you will have to hurry back to evade pursuit."

"I know," said Toothless. "Keep them safe," he told Cloudjumper, referring to both the dragons and the humans on Berk.

"I will." With a soft rush of wind the Stormcutter took off, flapping his four wings quietly as he too headed up the hill toward the current Chief's house, where Valka was staying with Hiccup.

Looking up at the stars, Toothless wondered if he should send a prayer up to the human gods but decided against it. If what the humans believed was true, his fate and the fate of this mission could very well already be decided. If he had to kill, so be it.

A strange sadness washed over him at the thought of having to end a life just to get what he wanted. \_Well, that's not the most positive

way to look at it. \_He suppressed the sadness, knowing that if push came to shove, he wouldn't hesitate to kill any dragon or human attempting to harm someone he cared about. \_But wasn't that what he was? The offspring of lightning and death itself? Surely he could live up to the title. \_Destruction ran in his blood.

But the little voice in the back of his mind still spoke. \_Don't you remember what happened last time you took a life?\_

\_Yes. \_It had been a year and still he had nightmares about waking up to Stoick, dead before him. Sometimes the dreams were even darker, and it was Hiccup who lay expressionless on the ground, empty eyes staring up at the sky. But no one controlled him now. If he chose to kill, it would not be senseless or at the bidding of some other, evil force.

\_The Alpha protects them all.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So here we are. Time to rescue Ash. But will they be too late to save her?<strong>

## 27. Chapter 24 Pt 1

Upstairs in his childhood home, Hiccup was pulling off the top of his flight suit piece by piece, getting ready to go to bed. \_Soon he would be in a different house, and he wouldn't be by himself anymore! \_It thrilled and terrified him that he was going to marry Astrid. The Chief felt bad for leaving his mother alone in the house she and his father had originally built together, but then remembered that Cloudjumper always enjoyed hanging around, and figured that by making a few adjustments to the layout, he could easily make room for the large dragon to settle in. At the moment, he could hear the Stormcutter settling into the shelter Hiccup and Valka had attached to the house for him. Well, Hiccup built, and Valka more \_watched \_while sweetly asking favors of passing dragons, who literally couldn't say no to her, and soon a large structure had been built.

Smiling at the memory of his mother convincing completely unwilling dragons to help with construction, Hiccup almost didn't notice the silhouette in the window above his bed. "What the- Toothless?"

The black dragon quietly hopped down from the hole in the roof, padding towards him.

"What is it, bud? Is something wrong?" Hiccup missed having his dragon in his room but knew it was for the best that Toothless had his own home, a place he now shared with a mate and a stray juvenile Night Fury.

Toothless rumbled, before pressing his forehead against Hiccup's bare chest. Hiccup's arms came up to wrap around his dragon's neck, and for a moment they just stood there, comforting each other. Old hurts and new concerns welled up and ebbed away, as the inseparable pair reflected on just how separated they had become.

"Do you want to go flying in the morning, Toothless?" The Night Fury

stepped back and shook his head, sending a pang through Hiccup's chest. "Ohâ€¦"

Toothless backed up a bit more and spread his wings slightly, gesturing out to the sky, then to himself. "You're going flying, yourself?" Hiccup asked, somewhat confused. Nodding, Toothless held up his tail. "You're wearing your independent tailfinâ€¦ is something wrong with it?"

Toothless shrugged, before opening and closing the prosthetic himself. Hiccup heard a slight grinding sound, and realized that something must have bent in one of the finer mechanical portions of the tail. "I think I understand." Throwing on an old tunic and some boots over the pants of his flight suit, he opened the door to the stairs and led Toothless out to the front door, passing Valka as she sipped some tea.

"Hello boys! Off on an adventure?" she smiled.

"Nah, just fixing one of the gears in his fin. I think he has to go somewhere," Hiccup added.

"Well, good luck to you both. I'll be off to bed shortly but I'll see you in the morning, son."

"Alright, Mom!" he called behind him before quietly closing the massive wooden door.

\* \* \*

><p>About two hours later in the forge, Hiccup wiped his forearm across his glistening brow, finally satisfied with his handiwork. In the flickering torchlight he inspected the new fin he had constructed for Toothless. He wasn't able to salvage the entirety of the previous prosthetic, so he decided to scrap it and start over. After reinforcing the structure of the fin he'd originally designed, he had replaced some of the gears with Gronkle iron parts to prevent further damage to it. He didn't want Toothless stranded somewhere without a way home again. He'd also switched out the red fabric for a black fireproof material he'd designed recently. Looking over, he could see his dragon breathing slowly and evenly, fast asleep in the corner. He yawned, stretching out his arms and back. <em>Time for me to get some shuteye, too.<em>

"Come on, bud. It's finished." One green eye opened halfway, as though considering waking up and finding the prospect unpleasant. Hiccup walked over to him with the fin and knelt, fastening the prosthetic across the end of Toothless's tail and aligning the joints. The dragon flexed the fin and the prosthetic experimentally, slowly opening and closing it repeatedly. Pleased, the Chief stood up once more and yawned again, cracking his neck loudly in the process. The Night Fury got to his feet as well, leaning over the table to sniff at the discarded piece of red fabric that had made up half his tailfin for so long. Seeming to understand, Hiccup told him, "If you don't like the black I'll work on making a red version. It's fireproof, and the gears and parts are made of Gronkle iron, so it'll withstand a lot more damage than any of your previous prosthetics, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be careful."

Toothless nodded, then came in to nuzzle his rider once more with a

low rumble in his chest. Hiccup was becoming concerned. Toothless was always openly affectionate, but this seemed moreâ€¦ final. With that horrifying thought he quickly asked, "You're coming back, right, bud?"

The black dragon nodded again, slowly, as if to say, \_I think so.\_

Somewhat relieved, Hiccup pulled the torch from its sconce on the wall and extinguished it in a small bucket of water near his workbench. In the sudden darkness he reached out, finding Toothless at his side, guiding him out of the cluttered forge and into the moonlit night.

The Night Fury walked at his rider's side all the way up to Hiccup's current home, giving the human one last nudge with his nose. Hiccup scratched the scales on his dragon's neck, rubbed the side of his face, and said, "You better bring that tail back in one piece, or there will be consequences!"

Rolling his eyes, Toothless mumbled the dragon equivalent of "Blah, blah, blah" before turning and heading up the hill to his shelter. Pushing open the door, he paused to gaze yearningly at his mate, the scars on her hide almost invisible in the flickering shadows from the dwindling fire. He also noted that Cinder now slept on his own pile of straw and blankets on the other side of the room. Silently he crept around the dying embers of the fire, before curling around Lightning's sleeping form as he had done every night since they had become mates. She shifted, murmuring something that Toothless couldn't make out. Breathing in deeply, he closed his eyes to savor the smell of flowers, trying to absorb as much of the moment as he could to savor in the coming days.

\* \* \*

><p>The approach of dawn came all too soon. Blinking away his sleepiness, Toothless peered through the darkness of the room to see Cinder rising as well. As he stood, he softly nuzzled Lightning's neck, careful not to wake her. Silently, he crept up next to Cinder, and gesturing with his head, motioned the smaller dragon to the door. Outside, Stormfly was just arriving, landing with a soft thump in the grass.<p>

"Does Astrid know you're coming with us?" Toothless kept his voice low.

Whispering back, the Nadder replied, "I woke her up and made sure she understood I was going on a flight."

"Well, we will find out soon enough whether or not she and Hiccup got the message."

\* \* \*

><p>"Toothless? Hey, bud, you in there?" Slowly cracking open the door to the shelter, Hiccup hoped he'd see three Night Furies fast asleep in their beds. When his gaze fell upon Lightning in the corner, her face buried in her paws, with Toothless and Cinder nowhere to be seen, his hope rapidly diminished into concern.<p>



"Hey, Lightning," he said soothingly as he approached the desolate Night Fury. "It's going to be alright, I'm sure. Whatever they're up to, I'm sure Toothless has a good reason for it. He's disappeared before, but he always comes home."

Slowly Lightning looked up at Hiccup's kind smile, her calm demeanor betrayed by the devastation in her eyes. The remaining hope that had been in Hiccup's heart fled at her expression, and immediately he began to worry transparently. Stroking Lightning's head and neck, he dropped to his knees and let her rest her head in his lap. \_Where could they have gone?\_

"Hiccup? Hiccup!" A familiar voice called his name frantically. Lightning lifted her head slightly, eyes trained on the door. Hiccup didn't move from his seat on the floor, simply waiting for the storm to arrive.

The door burst open. "Hiccup!"

"Hey, Astrid."

"Hiccup, Stormfly is- wait, where's Toothless? And the little Night Fury?"

Lightning let out a quiet moan and pressed her face into Hiccup's chest, and instinctively his arms came up around her neck. "I don't know," he said, sounding defeated as he stroked her neck and head in an attempt to be comforting.

"Stormfly is gone, too. She woke me up early this morning, squawking through my window and shaking her wings up at the sky. She stuck her head in and rubbed it against mine before taking off in this direction," she paused, then admitted, a little embarrassed, "I honestly thought I was dreaming it, and I just fell back asleep. But when I got up a little while ago and went out to feed her, she wasn't there. Do you think they're all together?"

"If I had to wager on it, I'd say almost definitely," Hiccup said from his position on the floor. "And wherever they wentâ€¦ I don't think it's close, or safe."

Silently, Astrid walked over to where he sat and sunk down to her knees beside him, resting one hand on Hiccup's shoulder and laying the other on Lightning's head. Together, they hoped for the best, but couldn't stop the fear from welling up inside themselves.

## 28. Chapter 24 Pt 2

\*\*Sorry for the delay, had some stuff to take care of. Here you go; enjoy!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>It had been more than two days. Toothless rotated his head back and forth, stretching out his neck and shoulders. Beside him, Cinder gave no sign of weariness or fatigue, only determination. On his other side, Stormfly flew in silence, carrying a bundle of netting in her claws. Cinder had already told them everything he knew about the

layout of the island and the most likely location of his sister, and now they remained quiet as Toothless formulated a plan. Soaring over an endless ocean, they flapped their wings every so often to stay aloft in the wind.<p>

Hours later, as the sun was sinking below the horizon, a dark smudge appeared along the horizon. "There," Cinder pointed.

"I see it," said Toothless quietly. "Alright, here's what we are going to doâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Flame lounged outside of Brann's cave, contemplatively chewing on some fish and actively ignoring the Serpents guarding the Night Fury leader as they quarreled and hissed at each other. The stars were beginning to appear in the early night sky, and he thought briefly about the other Night Furies as they cowered in their caves, knowing better than to venture outside at night with the bloodthirsty Serpents wandering about. Looking out from this vantage point he could see many of those caves, and the dark silhouettes of Brann's minions as they patrolled for unsuspecting prey.<p>

Behind him, he could hear Brann shouting loudly as he prepared to punish yet another prisoner. Patiently he waited for the screaming to begin. \_They always screamed\_, he thought with a dark smirk. Finishing his meal, he stood and turned around to go back inside and watch when a shrill, unearthly shriek shattered the still evening air. Wincing at the volume, he whipped around, seeing nothing. The moon was a small sliver, providing no illumination, but Flame could see well enough in the dark, as most all dragons could.

He stood there, staring out for several minutes, before finally relaxing and turning back. \_The Serpents must have found another victim to torment- \_

The shriek sounded again, closer. Again, Flame spun around, unable to pinpoint the origin of the sound. The nearby Serpents had ceased their bickering and gathered around him, sniffing the air. \_Something wasn't rightâ€|\_

Suddenly a large shape whooshed past their heads. Screeching madly, it flew deeper into the canyon, vanishing into the gloom.

Stunned, the group of dragons just stood there for a moment. Without warning another bellow filled the night. "\_Who dares interrupt my work?!\_"

Brann's angry howl spurred Flame into action. Immediately he began shouting at the Serpents. "Well, what are you waiting for? Go find it!" Hissing, they scurried down the path to the rest of the canyon, crying out their creepy wails as they summoned the rest of their brethren.

Then, from the opposite end of the canyon, a massive explosion shook the ground, knocking Flame off his feet. \_What the-

-

"Flame!"

"Brann, I-"

"What \_was \_that?!" the larger Night Fury raged. "What is going on?!"

"I- I don't know, Brann, I just sent the Serpents after the screeching \_thing \_and then the explosion-"

Another explosion shook the night, lighting up another portion of the canyon.

"What are you waiting for?!" Brann shrieked. "\_Go\_ \_do something about it!\_" Flame took one good look at his leader, taking in the spatters of blood on his hide and dripping from his claws, and fled in the direction of the explosions.

Brann, by nature very suspicious and having become only increasingly paranoid since killing Shade and taking over, retreated into his cave, ignoring the bloody dragons scattered around the space and stoking up the fire he always kept burning there. Something very strange was going on, and he wasn't about to stick \_his\_ neck out to figure it out.

\* \* \*

><p>"One more should do it," Toothless whispered to Cinder.<p>

Nodding, the young Night Fury began charging up another plasma blast, and Toothless did the same.

This section of the canyon seemed deserted, dark caves lining the walls. Toothless wondered where all of the Night Furies were, for the only life he had seen was a snake-like dragon, almost his size, slinking through the darkness.

Toothless nodded once and they both fired above their heads so that their blasts would collide, creating another explosion. Ducking, they covered their sensitive ears with their paws, before blinking at the bright light as it rapidly faded into darkness once again.

"Okay, now-"

Toothless was interrupted by an unfamiliar voice, calling out, "Who's there?"

Cinder froze, and hissed, "\_It's Flame!\_"

"Run," Toothless urged him quietly, and they took off, silently streaking through the canyon.

\_Maybe we lost him- \_The rock ahead of him shattered and blew apart, forcing them to skid around the falling debris. Quickly glancing back, Toothless could see the running form of Flame, chasing them down.

"Get back here!" the pursuing dragon shouted at them.

\_Uh, I'm going to have to go with a \_no\_ on that offer. \_Reaching out, he yanked Cinder into an alcove disguised by the dust from

Flame's shot. \_What terrible aim, \_he thought fleetingly as he sat upright on his haunches, tucking the younger dragon against him.

Seconds later, Flame ran past their hiding spot without even slowing down. They waited, agonizing moments, before Toothless dared to peer out of the crack to look around. The canyon was deserted. In the distance they could hear Stormfly shriek again as she led the snake-dragons on a wild chase away from them. Slowly they crept from the crack, about to turn back the way they came, when a low voice called, "Wait!"

Toothless whipped around, instinctively shoving Cinder behind him, to see a smaller Night Fury standing not twenty feet away.

But this dragon didn't have Flame's yellow eyes, instead, they were a deep forest green. "Don't attack!" she whispered, glancing nervously behind her. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Holly?" from behind Toothless Cinder appeared, looking surprised. "What are you doing out here?"

"\_Cinder?\_ Is that really you?" The forest-eyed dragon spoke softly but with shock. "Flame told us you were killed!"

"No, I've been with Toothless here and the other dragons on Berk."

"Berk?"

"Hey," Toothless interrupted. "Let's catch up somewhere lessâ€¦ exposed, shall we?"

"Right," nodded Holly. "Follow me."

She ran in the direction Flame had gone, which immediately put Toothless on his guard, but Cinder raced after her without question. Turning onto a side path, she led them up to another level of caves, running as quickly as she could without raising an alert. They heard another shriek from Stormfly, still far enough away to keep Toothless from panicking. "Where are we-"

Holly ducked into one of the caves, Cinder and Toothless on her heels. Slowing to a walk, she guided them around a corner, whereâ€¦ Four sets of eyes immediately locked onto them.

Jumping back, Toothless grabbed Cinder and growled.

"No, wait!" Holly cried. "You can't leave, don't worry, we aren't going to hurt you."

Toothless didn't move, still eyeing the other shadowed forms. "Show yourselves."

One of the dragons sprayed a stream of plasma across the ground, barely illuminating the space. In the dim light, Toothless could see four Night Furies beside Holly, all with similarly dark green eyes. "We can't keep the fire going for long," one of them whispered. "The Serpents will be drawn to it and will not hesitate to kill us."

"You mean those snake-dragons out there? I wouldn't be too worried, Stormfly has that under control."

"Stormfly?" One voice spoke up.

"What do you mean?" asked another.

"Cinder, why are you here?" Holly questioned.

Cinder quickly replied, "We came for Ash."

No one spoke. The five dragons across from Toothless and Cinder all exchanged glances. "Cinder-" started Holly.

"No one has seen Ash since before you left with Flame," the largest of the five, though still not as big as Toothless, spoke gently.

Toothless looked down to see a frighteningly grim expression on Cinder's little face. "I will find her."

Holly looked like she was going to speak again when Toothless hastily interrupted her. "Where was she last seen?"

The five exchanged another round of glances.

"Brann had her," said one female.

"After heâ€¦ well, he took her into his cave, which is where he takes all hisâ€¦ \_special \_prisoners," said the largest one darkly.

Toothless did not want to know what "special" meant. "Where is Brann's cave?"

The dragons looked shocked. "What, you can't actually be planning on going in there!"

"That's suicide."

One of the females eyed Toothless appraisingly. "Well, you are pretty big, so maybe it's not \_that \_crazyâ€¦"

Holly cut her off. Toothless noticed that Holly was young, probably no older than fourteen or fifteen, and so was surprised that she had been the one to venture out and get them.

"It's crazy because \_Brann \_is crazy," she stated.

They all nodded.

"I don't care," spat Cinder. "I'm going to find her, and I'm going to take her with me, no matter what."

Toothless asked again. "Where is Brann's cave?"

All focus turned away from Cinder.

"Who exactly are you?"

"Where are you from?"

"How did Cinder find you?"

"Why are you here?"

The questions spun around him until he shook his head. "I'm Toothless. I'm from Berk. Cinder was brought along by Flame to attack the humans and dragons on my island. We captured him, and Flame left him for dead. I'm here to find Ash and take her back with us."

"\_Your \_island?"

"Are you the clan leader there, then?"

Cinder had had enough. "Stop asking questions! Toothless isn't just a leader, he's an Alpha. \_The \_Alpha. He defeated the Red Death and a Bewilderbeast and he's not afraid of Brann. Now, is that coward still hiding at the top of the canyon?"

Stunned, the five dragons just nodded. Another shriek sounded, this time closer.

"Okay, Toothless, let's go." Cinder turned and darted out, leaving Toothless with no choice but to follow. They had just left the cave whenâ€|

"Wait!"

"What is it now?" Toothless turned and glared at Holly. The smaller dragon flinched but didn't leave.

"After you find Ash, will you come back for us?"

"How many of you are there?"

"I'm not sure. We never really see each other anymore, since we have to stay in our caves almost constantly. I thinkâ€| there are a few more than a hundred of us left." she guessed.

\_One hundred Night Furies. \_It wasn't a massive number but it was a start, and made Toothless feel far more optimistic than being the last of his kind.

"There's nothing I can do tonightâ€|" he trailed off, seeing the desperation in her eyes. "But I swear to you, as an Alpha, that I will return, and I will end this suffering."

Something akin to hope flashed in her eyes and she nodded, before hurrying back into the depths of her family's cave.

"Toothless!" Cinder hissed.

Not sure what he had just pledged himself to do, Toothless nodded and ran after the young dragon. They sprinted up more winding paths before ending up on the rim of the canyon, racing along the edge. Suddenly a dark shape swooped down and landed heavily before them.

"Stormfly?"

The Nadder nodded slowly, panting. In places her lustrous blue scales were clouded by scorch marks, and the nets were carelessly strewn across her back. Below, in the canyon, they could hear shrieks of confusion as the Serpents and Flame attempted to locate the mysterious intruder.

"We're almost there, Stormfly," Cinder said reassuringly, before darting up a path leading straight towards a large cave located at the highest point in the canyon. The two older dragons followed, barely trying to quiet their footfalls.

As they approached they noticed an orange glow emanating from within the cave, and they slowed their pace, until-

"I can smell her!" cried Cinder, and immediately he began sprinting again.

Suddenly a long shape leapt from the shadows and tackled the small Night Fury. Without thinking Toothless jumped straight for the attacking dragon, knocking it off of Cinder and rolling away with it.

Leaping clear of the dragon, Toothless stood, ready to fight. "Stormfly, get Cinder out of here."

It was a Serpent, and it suddenly twisted off the ground, its jaws snapping at Toothless's throat. Dodging the dragon, Toothless turned and bit down as hard as he could on the back of its neck, causing it to shriek with pain. Not wanting to alert the gathered forces below, he wrestled the Serpent to the ground before taking his claws and tearing them across the thrashing dragon's jugular. Immediately it began to writhe frantically, wheezing as blood poured from its throat, and Toothless pressed down with all of his strength to pin it to the ground. Gradually, its struggling ceased and its eyes glossed over.

Breathing heavily, Toothless stepped off of the Serpent, looking up to see Cinder and Stormfly watching him with wide didn't have time to contemplate what he had just done, or to clean the blood off of himself. Instead, he whispered, "Come on!"

They sprinted up the last length of trail and Toothless signaled them to flank the entrance of the cave. Cinder looked electrified and said without doubt, "She's in there."

Suddenly a loud scuffling noise came from within the cave. Wide-eyed, Toothless motioned for them to stay low and back up, slowly, into the shadows.

"Who's there?" a harsh voice called out from inside.

\_Seriously? Can't these guys just sneak up on us? Do they really have to ask "who's there"? \_It would be comical if the situation weren't so perilous.

Cinder stood upright and whispered, "Get in and get her out of there. Once you have her, if you can't find me, leave."

Before Toothless could react, the young dragon jumped into the entrance of the cave and screeched, "Come out and face me, you bastard! Come fight me, you coward! You pathetic excuse for a dragon!" before turning and tearing down the path they had just come up.

An enraged roar was their only warning before Brann leapt from the cave, not noticing Toothless and Stormfly in the shadows.

"Why don't \_you \_come face me! You shall pay for your insolence!" his maniacal outbursts faded slightly as he followed Cinder down the path, and the two dragons took the opportunity to sneak inside the cave.

What they saw shocked them.

There were \_bodies.\_ A lot of them, around the edges of the space. In the middle of the room a freshly bleeding form lay prone, and once Toothless was certain that it was just him and Stormfly, he darted over to the body and found that it was breathing raggedly. Its face was torn up, and claw marks slashed all over its hide.

He was about to try and rouse it when Stormfly whispered from the back of the cave, past the smoldering fire.

"Toothless."

Her grim tone was enough. Approaching slowly, he saw that the Nadder stood over a small black object. On closer inspection, it wasn't some\_thing.\_ It was some\_one.\_

Her wings stuck out at odd angles, and there were various scrapes and scratches along her entire body. Her eyes were closed.

"Ash?" Toothless held his breath. She didn't move.

\_Oh, no.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder ducked into an empty cave, panting, hoping that his pursuer would run past his hiding spot, like Flame had. Seconds passed, and Brann appeared outside the cave entrance. Instead of sprinting past, he skidded to a halt and stood there, sniffing the air.<p>

Suddenly he looked straight at Cinder, who shut his eyes tight, knowing they would be a dead giveaway to his location in the shadows. He heard one footstep, then another.

\_This was it, then. Goodbye, Ash! \_He stopped himself from whimpering, and just when he could hear Brann's ragged breathing, something happened outside.

There was a desperate flapping of wings, followed by a thump on the dirt. "Brann? Brann! Are you in there?"

\_Flame.\_

Brann gave a low growl and turned around, walking back out of the



cave. "\_What is it?\_" he hissed at his second-in-command.

"Well, I, uh-"

"Spit it out!"

"We couldn't find anyone. No one responsible for the explosions, and that screeching thing is nowhere in sight. I think it might have been a distractionâ€|"

He trailed off at Brann's livid stare. "While you were all chasing down shadows, someone came into my cave and challenged me before running off. I was just searching for himâ€|"

They both came to the same conclusion. "Get back to the cave!" Flame roared for the Serpents, still milling about in the bottom of the canyon. It took a moment, but then they all flocked to the air, their tiny wings struggling to support their long bodies.

Back inside the cave, Cinder's heart dropped. He had to warn Toothless before that horde got back to Brann's cave. He sprinted out and turned in the direction the other dragons had gone in when a voice stopped him.

"I wouldn't go that way, if I were you."

Cinder whirled around. "Toothless! You shouldn't scare other dragons like that!"

"Haven't heard \_that \_one before. We have to go, now."

They took off, beating their wings hard to escape before their presence in the sky was detected.

"Wait," said Cinder. "Where's Stormfly? Does she have Ash?!" he ended frantically.

Toothless didn't know how to answer. "Stormfly is already on her way back to Berk. We'll probably catch up to her soon." He paused. "She has Ash."

"Is she okay? We have to catch up to them, now." Without another word, Cinder sped away. His weariness had faded at the mention of his little sister.

"Cinder, wait!"

No more waiting. Cinder sniffed the wind, picking up Stormfly's scent. It was fresh, and mingled with the more faint smell of his sister. Growling, he flapped his wings harder than he ever had in his entire life, and hurtled through the night.

Toothless didn't want to use his fastest speed to catch up to the younger dragon, because the boom it produced would attract unwanted attention. But he was more than fast enough to overtake the smaller Night Fury without the burst. "Cinder, you need to listen to me."

"No!" Cinder cried.

"Cinder!"

"I don't want to hear it!"

In the distance they could both see the flying form of Stormfly, holding a bundle with her claws.

"You have to listen to me. Ash isâ€¦ Ash is very, very hurt. It looks like she hasn't eaten in a while, and she's all beat up, along with what you told me about her wings. You need toâ€¦"

Cinder couldn't hear anything anymore. She wasn't dead yet, butâ€¦ All of this, to get his sister back, alive just long enough to see her die. \_Noâ€¦ \_

"NO!"

The younger dragon's anguished cry startled Toothless. "Cinder, wait!"

But he couldn't wait any more. "She \_will not \_die!"

Leaving Toothless behind, he soon caught up to Stormfly, and flew beneath her to get a better look at what lay in the soft nets she was holding. Grabbing onto the ropes with his paws, he held on to the net, tucking in his wings. At the sudden increase in weight, Stormfly looked down in surprise, to see Cinder gazing at his unconscious sister.

"Cinderâ€¦" the Nadder started, but just then Toothless caught up.

"Just let him have a moment, Stormfly. Then I'll take him."

"He can stay as long as he wants. They aren't \_that \_heavy. Not compared to some of those Vikings we've had to lug around."

"Yeah, you try flying with Stoick the Vast on your neck for two days straight."

Below them, Cinder reached in between the ropes to gently rest his paw on his sister's small cheek. "Ashâ€¦ Ash, listen to me. You're safe now. I promise. You have to hold on, Ash. I can'tâ€¦ I can't do it without you. I can't. Please, Ash," he begged. "Please wake up. Pleaseâ€¦ pleaseâ€¦ pleaseâ€¦"

Looking at her still body, something snapped in him and he started shaking the net, shouting, "Ash! Ash! Wake up!"

At the sound of Cinder's pleas, Toothless swooped down. "Cinder, stop that!"

But the young dragon was frantic. She was alive, her heart was beatingâ€¦ all she had to do was open her eyes and she'd be all right. She'd be all right.

Something grabbed Cinder around his middle and he struggled against it, unable to escape Toothless's steel grip. The larger dragon pulled him off the net, and screeching, Cinder reached out for his sister as they fell away from her. "No! \_Let. Me. GO!\_"

Suddenly he quieted, and Toothless looked down at him suspiciously.

"Toothless. Toothless. Look, Toothless." Toothless looked up, and nearly dropped Cinder.

Between the ropes, a pair of silvery green eyes was looking straight at him.

\* \* \*

><p>"AaaaaAAAAAARGH!" Brann's scream of rage echoed around the canyon.<p>

"Brann, I don't think it was one of oursâ€¦" Flame trailed off from his position at the entrance of Brann's cave.

"Obviously not. Why would one of those sniveling dragons dare to challenge me?" He growled menacingly. "No, this was an intruder."

"What did he do?"

"He killed one of the Serpents, and he took one of the prisoners. Just one."

"Which one?"

"The little one."

Suddenly it all made sense to Flame. He had assumed the worst, but nowâ€¦ "It was that Night Fury from Berk. The one that stopped me from collecting Skygge. They must not have killed Cinder after allâ€¦"

Brann looked up at him, his bloodshot eyes filled with rage. "Are you certain?" he asked softly.

"Almost completely. It's the only explanation that makes any sense."

Brann laughed once, a cruel sound, then roared, his eroding sanity taking another blow. "I think we need some eyes on this \_Berk\_. I want to know just what we are dealing with, here."

"As you wish, Brann."

Flame backed away, and Brann looked down at the body of the prisoner he had been... \_dealing with\_ the previous evening. Its blood had pooled all around it, and he reveled in the scent of it. Suddenly filled with rage once more, he snarled, then without pause shot a plasma blast at the body, sending it up in flames. \_That Night Fury was living on borrowed time. \_No one \_denied him what he wanted, then \_humiliated\_ him, and got away with it.\_

Looking out of the cave at the blood red sunrise, he began to laugh, the evil sound of it echoing maniacally through the island.

## 29. Chapter 25

It was the dawn of the sixth day since Toothless had left, and Lightning lay on the roof of the shelter, her gaze trained on the horizon. She had come up here after Hiccup and Astrid were forced to attend their duties in the village that morning, and hadn't moved since. After the second night of her vigil, a few people and dragons tried to coax her down to eat and rest, but she would simply shake her head, her expression betraying none of her thoughts or emotions.

Sometimes Hiccup, or even Astrid, would climb up onto the top of the tall shelter and sit with her, not speaking, just lending her support. But the humans had to eat and sleep and deal with their own responsibilities, so she was on her own most of the time.

Yesterday a Terrible Terror had appeared, scrambling along the roof to sit near her and stare out at the horizon as well. After a few minutes, it squeaked, "Waitâ€¦ what are we doing?"

Normally, Lightning would have laughed, but now could only sigh. "We are waiting for Toothless and Stormfly and Cinder to return."

"Oh."

After that, he hadn't made a sound, but at some point another had shown up, then another, until there was almost an entire flock of Terrors perched alongside her, uncharacteristically silent as they watched the skies for their Alpha.

Passersby would glance up, then do a double-take as they noticed the group of dragons staring out to sea. Looking in the same direction, they would see nothing, and shrug it off. But after the day had passed, more and more Vikings and dragons would stop and follow their line of sight, made enormously curious and slightly unnerved by the vigil kept by Lightning and the Terrors at the shelter on the top of the hill. Nervously, the humans muttered to one another, wondering if this was foreshadowing some terrible doom, but the dragons knew perfectly well why Lightning was up there, and would settle on the rooftops below to join her watch. While most of them didn't know Lightning very well yet, they were all quietly impressed by her devotion to Toothless, and earned their respect with her unwavering commitment.

And so here she was, looking out to where the sea met the sky in a hazy line, the sun barely peeking over the horizon behind her, a number of dragons asleep on the nearest rooftops in the village and a group of Terrible Terrors curled up around her and draped over her back.

She saw Cloudjumper leave his shelter down the hill and look up at her. Taking off, his four wings making barely a whisper, he sailed over and gently settled next to her on the roof of the shelter. Some of the Terrors, disturbed, made little grumbling noises, but quickly went back to sleep. The Stormcutter quietly asked her how she was doing, to which she shrugged, again disrupting the Terrors as they slept. Over the past week, Cloudjumper had made a point to check on her several times a day, sometimes offering words of support, sometimes saying nothing.

"You know," he said softly, "I don't think Toothless would appreciate it if I allowed his mate to die of exhaustion and very possibly starvation."

That was, of course, assuming that he came back alive.

"If-" she swallowed, "\_When \_he comes backâ€¦ he might be better off if you \_had \_let me die." She finished this with a scowl.

\_Obviously a week with no sleep does not do wonders for one's disposition,\_ thought Cloudjumper. But he only said, "You're not the only one who misses him."

As if to prove the Stormcutter's point, Hiccup stepped out of his house down the hill and gazed out at the horizon, running one hand through his hair. Turning around, he started at the sight of Lightning and Cloudjumper surrounded by Terrible Terrors on the roof.

Giving them a small smile, he trekked up to the shelter, climbing onto a barrel and jumping up to grab onto the back edge of the curved roof to haul himself onto the shingles. Coming around behind them, he rubbed Cloudjumper's shoulder affectionately, stepped carefully between the Terrors, and slowly sat down next to Lightning, resting a hand on the back of her neck.

Several of the small dragons, groggily noticing the human's presence, crawled over to him and settled on his lap, where he stroked their curled up bodies with his free hand. Again, Lightning was moved by how much the dragons on Berk trusted the Viking Chief, and how much he had done for them. Glancing down at his metal leg, she couldn't help but be reminded of Toothless's prosthetic, and the pain in her chest was almost enough to cause her to sob.

For a while they all sat there, keeping watch as the sun rose steadily behind them. Slowly the village came to life before them, humans and dragons stirring to begin their days. Eventually, Hiccup and Cloudjumper were forced to leave the roof, having their own obligations to take care of. Both promised to return later, but it mattered little to Lightning. Half of the Terrors left to find food, and came back in two's and three's with enough small fish to share with those who had stayed behind. Quite a few of them offered to share with her, but she politely declined, which suited the tiny dragons just fine.

She found herself daydreaming, her exhaustion beginning to catch up to her. Memories of the meadow, of laughter and happiness, filtered through her mind. Images of Toothless grinning mischievously, Toothless gazing seriously into her eyes, Toothless playing with Cinder, Toothless promising her he would returnâ€¦

"AGH!" she shouted suddenly, losing her patience. Startled, some of the Terrors dropped their fish off the roof. To no one in particular, Lightning began to rant, pacing back and forth. "Why couldn't he just take me with him? If he dies, I die. Making me wait is just cruel, you know?" she directed this at the Terror who had been first to join her on the roof.

"Umâ€¦" he started, but she kept talking.

"I understand that he does things for a reason, and I get that he wants me to be safe, but is me being safe more important than me being happy?"

"Umâ€¦" he tried again.

"I mean, he's the Alpha, and the gods know we all have to obey the \_Alpha,\_ but I don't love him because that's what he is. I love him for \_who \_he is, damn it!"

"Uh, Lightning?" he said, looking slightly nervous. The other Terrors had backed away, jaws dropped, staring at her.

"I'm so sorry," she apologized, feeling awful for shouting at the little dragons. "I don't usually lose my temper, it tends to frighten people."

The little Terror actually laughed at this. "Losing \_your \_temper? We aren't called Terrors for nothing."

She couldn't help but smile slightly as he continued. "But, uh, Lightning?" he trailed off, looking over her shoulder.

"Whatâ€¦?" Finally she realized that all the Terrors weren't looking at her, but \_behind \_her.

Whipping around, she stared at the horizon, willing there to be something, \_anything\_ out there. Moments passed, and still she could see nothing in the cloudless blue sky, but the Terrors had their eyes trained on something she could not detect.

"Hey guys, what's going on?" Startled, Lightning turned to see Hiccup standing next to her. \_He moves awfully quietly for having a metal legâ€¦\_ She looked back at the horizon so intensely that Hiccup's smile faded, and he, too, began to watch the skies.

Minutes passed, and still they stood there, unmoving. Cloudjumper flew up, and not saying anything, perched next to them. Slowly, a crowd gathered. Dragons who knew what Lightning was waiting for began to look, too, determined to catch a glimpse of their returning Alpha. The villagers looked to their Chief, who took no notice of their hushed whispers, and quietly spread across the hillside, all gazing towards the horizon.

"Look!" someone shouted.

It could have been a dragon, it could have been a human, but then a Viking yelled, "There!" pointing atâ€¦

Lightning held her breath, eyes strained as she refused to blink. \_There.\_ A dark spot just above the horizon. Next to her, Hiccup inhaled sharply, and she knew he saw it, too. Heart racing, she began to spread her wings, but the human stopped her.

"Wait, Lightning." She looked at him to see determination radiating from his features. "Would you take me with you?" It took her less than a second to decide. At her nod, Hiccup jumped onto her back, shouting, "Let's go!"

With a roar she leapt from the roof, beating her wings so hard that a loud \_whoosh \_echoed behind her, knocking a few of the Terrors off the roof. Exclamations rose from the crowd, both human and dragon, as they watched their Chief hurtle away on the back of the female Night Fury. \_This was it. \_

"They're back!" shouted Hookfang, who had joined the crowd with Barf and Belch, Meatlug, and their respective humans. Immediately they took off in pursuit of Lightning and Hiccup, followed by several other dragons and their riders.

Far ahead, flashing through the sky, Lightning felt Hiccup gently tighten his grip on her as he leaned on her neck, keeping low. She was amazed that he was able to hold on with no equipment, but then remembered that Valka had a habit of \_walking \_on Cloudjumper's back while they flew together. Gradually the dark spot became two distinct shapes, still impossibly far away.

Her blue eyes narrowed, she accelerated, bringing her wings down with another \_boom \_and becoming a blur in the air as she expertly navigated the wind. \_So this was how Toothless did it. \_Hiccup found that it was difficult to breathe without his flight helmet covering his face, so he pressed his forehead against Lightning's neck to suck in a quick breath before looking up again, squinting at the wind stinging his eyes.

\_Come on, come on! \_An interminable amount of time passed until they could see the shapes moving, wings beating. Looking back, Berk was far behind them. Lightning roared, the sound echoing over the water and carried by the wind.

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless was panting, his wings strained. Stormfly was taking a break from carrying the two young Night Furies, now Toothless held the net containing Ash and had Cinder laying on his back, as the younger male had finally lost his battle with his weariness.<p>

It had been an excruciatingly long journey, although they had been flying faster than they had to get to the island in the first place. Ash would drift in and out of consciousness, and seemed to focus on her brother when he spoke to her, but she said nothing, making not a single sound.

Staring out at nothing, it took Toothless a moment to register that he was hearing something besides the wind. Faintly, a roar echoed, and his ears perked up as he looked around for the dragon responsible. On his back, Cinder stirred, his sleep disturbed by the sound.

Stormfly swooped closer to him. "Did you hear that?"

Toothless was about to respond when he heard it again, slightly louder. Narrowing his eyes, he focused on the horizon.

\_There.\_

A black shape appeared, heading straight towards them.

Alarmed, Toothless was about to tell Stormfly to prepare herself when

he realized that unless they had gotten turned around at some point, which he doubted, this was not Flame or Brann coming to exact their revenge.

It roared again, the sound suddenly familiar. It wasâ€¦

"We're almost there!" he exclaimed, suddenly re-energized. Telling Cinder to hold on, he brought his tired wings down and blasted forward, careful not to jolt the net too much. Gradually the smudge began to take form, and he roared back, excited and relieved.

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup heard Toothless roar and his heart soared. <em>He was okay.<em> But what was that underneath him? His dragon's usually streamlined silhouette was bulky and misshapen, although Stormfly, farther behind him, appeared normal. \_Waitâ€¦ where's Cinder?\_

A minute passed before the shape began to make sense. Toothless roared again, and the sound was clear. He was carrying some kind of net, and there was something on his back. Rubbing Lightning's neck, Hiccup yelled against the wind, "Go get him!"

Growling in response, Lightning blasted forward one last time, and before them Toothless appeared to do the same. \_Ash must be in that net. \_Thenâ€¦ she could smell him. Faintly, but the sea and sky and forest scent was unmistakable. There was something else, too, though, something that gave her pause, besides the scents of the dragons with him. And then she could make out his eyes, green and bright, and everything else fled from her mind.

Thenâ€¦ they were together. "Toothless!" Lightning shouted, unable to decide whether she was elated or enraged. She passed him, banking hard to turn and come alongside him, Hiccup clinging to her back. With some surprise, she realized that Cinder was laying along Toothless's back, and briefly she wondered if her mate's spine was uncomfortable to lie on.

"Lightning!" Toothless called out, his voice sounding strained. "You need to go back and prepare Gobber. Take him to the shelter. I'm alright, but you have to go, as fast as you can." He looked down, and for the first time Lightning took in the net, but more importantly what was in it. A small black form was curled up, unmoving.

Shocked, she looked back at Toothless, then at Cinder, who looked more grim than she could ever imagine such a young dragon being.

On her back, Hiccup was doing the same thing. "Bud, whatâ€¦ \_who \_is that? Are you alright?"

Then he got a good look at his dragon. "Toothless! You're covered in blood!"

With a start, Lightning examined her mate and found that yes, he did have blood all over himself, but the stench of it was unfamiliar, so she found some relief. "You have some serious explaining to do!" she cried out behind her as she took off, heading back to Berk. Unprepared, Hiccup nearly tumbled off, barely managing to hang on.



"Wait, Lightning! Where are we going?" Hiccup yelled.

She only looked back at him and snorted.

"Back to Berk? Do you know who that dragon is? Is that why Toothless left? What is going on?!"

Feeling her shrug beneath him, Hiccup realized that she probably didn't know much more than he did. Resigning himself to being out of the loop, he leaned low on her neck, trying to be helpfully aerodynamic.

Soon enough they saw Snotlout riding Hookfang with the twins on Barf and Belch. Not far behind them a group of dragons and riders also approached, and both Lightning and Hiccup sighed.

Sitting up, Hiccup cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, "Back to Berk! Go back!" as he and Lightning sped past the confused group.

Not long after that, he and Lightning could make out the village as Berk loomed before them. Finally, she dove down and bounded to a stop in the village square. Immediately dragons and Vikings alike swarmed them. Hiccup tried to explain what was going on to the best of his ability, given that he had no idea what was going on. Lightning ducked through the crowd and ran into the forge, waking Grump as she knocked over a bucket of swords. Gobber was hammering a hunk of metal into something that was bound to be useful, but she didn't have time to wait.

"Well, hello there! Wha' can I do for ye-" Whining, she grabbed his old, weathered shirt and began to drag him out of the forge. "Whoa, lass! What do ye need?" he asked, extracting himself from her teeth. "Ye left a nice bite mark there, ye see that?"

Hiccup ran over. "Gobber! Toothless is almost back with Stormfly and Cinder, and they brought another dragon with them. It's small, but I think it's another Night Fury. Regardless, it wasn't moving; I think something is wrong with it."

Lightning whined loudly, gesturing with her head up the hill toward the shelter. Gobber looked confused, but Hiccup had his 'thinking' face on. "Are they taking the dragon to the shelter?" he asked.

She nodded firmly.

"Okay, Gobber, I think you know what we need to do."

"Right, lad. Let me get my goody bag an' I'll be up in a jiffy."

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless was losing steam. Cinder was now below him, holding onto the net, murmuring softly to his sister. Stormfly, noticing this, said, "Let me help you." Swooping in, she grabbed part of the net from Toothless so that they shared the weight. Berk was fast approaching, and a group of dragons and their riders had come out to greet them.<p>

"Toothless! Stormfly!" It was Meatlug, hovering with Fishlegs perched

on her back. The large young man looked like he was about to explode at the sight of dragons carrying other dragons with a human net.

Hookfang flew out towards them with a somewhat confused Snotlout on his back. He wasn't the only confused one, though. All of the Vikings who could see them were stunned by their behavior as well. Dragons using human tools? This just proved again how intelligent their reptilian companions were. \_If only they really knew\_.

The red Nightmare pulled up alongside them. "Hey, Toothless. Hey, Stormfly," shouted Snotlout.

Hookfang, surprised by the additional dragon, asked, "Do you need help?"

"Honestly, Hookfang, yes; but we're almost there and it would be too dangerous to try and give her to you now."

Unusually understanding, the Monstrous Nightmare gave them some distance and began yelling at the gathered dragons to go back into the village. "Nothing to see here! Go on, shoo!"

Grumbling, the dragons carried their confused riders back down to the island. Now over land, Toothless and Stormfly slowed their speed significantly, coming in low over the rooftops.

"Cinder," Toothless grunted. "You need to let go of the net."

"Gotcha."

Finally they reached the shelter, where Hiccup, Gobber, Astrid, and Lightning were waiting with Valka and Cloudjumper. Flapping their wings forcefully to stay airborne, Toothless and Stormfly slowly and carefully lowered the net. Hiccup ran up and held out his arms, reaching up to grab hold of their small cargo. Astrid and Valka rushed over to help untangle the motionless dragon from the netting. Anxiously, Cinder landed next to them, watching diligently as the humans handled his sister.

When they had freed her, they stood a moment and stared at her in awe. She was probably four and a half feet long, half Cinder's size, but heartbreakingly thin. Her small face was set in an unconscious grimace, and with shock they all took in the sight of her wounded body. Nearby, Toothless and Stormfly landed heavily, their breathing labored.

At Cinder's frantic whine they all snapped out of their examinations. "We need to get her inside, now," said Valka, gently pulling the Night Fury out of Hiccup's arms.

"Aye. An' those wings are broken. Hiccup, Astrid; you two go get material for some splints."

Nodding, the two ran down to the forge. The blacksmith opened the door for Valka, who hurried into the shelter with Cinder at her heels. Toothless and Lightning followed, not looking at each other. Stormfly and Cloudjumper peered through the entrance, observing the proceedings.

"Will one of you light the fire?" asked Valka as she set the unconscious dragon down onto Cinder's pile of blankets. Once there was a source of steady light, Gobber crouched near her and began sifting through his medical bag. Valka softly ran her hands over the dragon's body, feeling for internal injuries besides her broken wings and abraded hide.

The next few hours were a blur as the humans tended for Cinder's little sister. Finally, Gobber sat up and declared there was nothing else they could do but wait. Leaving behind some of his "dragon tea" and salve, he wondered vaguely why Night Furies always seemed to be in trouble.

Toothless, Cinder, and Stormfly were in a state of near-shock from stress and exhaustion. The humans gathered outside in the fading sunlight. Astrid sobbed, "Stormfly!" and embraced her dragon, before turning and wrapping her arms around Hiccup, still sniffing. The Viking Chief held his wife-to-be tightly, thankful that their dragons were alive and accounted for. Valka thanked Gobber, who headed back down to the forge to finish up some of his earlier work. She then patted Cloudjumper's shoulder, expressing without words how grateful she was for his safety.

The three humans left the dragons at the top of the hill, walking down to Hiccup and Valka's house to discuss the day over some human tea and food. "I'll be back in a little bit!" Hiccup called back to the dragons.

Cloudjumper took one look in at the Night Furies and nudged Stormfly, who was staring blankly at the sky. "I think you should go get some rest, Stormfly." Nodding slowly, she began to walk down to the Hofferson house, too tired to even consider flying. The Stormcutter glanced at his Alpha once more, decided against trying to reason with him, and followed the humans down to his own shelter.

Cinder was watching his sister sleep, wrapped up in white bandages with wooden splints on her wings. He had listened when the humans worried over how long they had been broken and whether or not they would heal correctly, but he was too dazed to really consider what that might mean for her future. He didn't realize he was drooping until something lifted him up and settled him on a pile of straw next to his sister's blankets. Blearily, he gazed up to see Lightning as she patted his head softly, saying, "You need to get some rest, to be strong for Ash."

He couldn't argue with her, and within moments was fast asleep.

Lightning looked over to where her mate sat near the wall, his eyes staring out blankly at the wall across the room. He was trembling slightly, still stained with dried blood. "Come on, Toothless," she said quietly, her heart aching. "You're covered in blood. Can you fly a little longer?"

Slowly he looked over at her, seemingly having trouble focusing. "I guess so," he said woodenly.

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless guided her to the cove in silence, stumbling as he landed. "We need to clean you up," Lightning decided. "Come on, into the water."<p>

Although he was painfully weary, the water was soothing and brought him clarity. Ducking his head under, he began to scrub the Serpent's blood off of himself, trying desperately to not think of what he had done. Coming back up for air, he saw his mate swim over. She began to rub his hide with her paws, careful not to scratch him with her claws as she helped him wash off the blood. "What happened?" she whispered when he was clean.

He couldn't look her in the eyes, and he couldn't answer. All he could do was shake his head. Understanding, Lightning just nodded and came in closer, leaning her body against his. He draped his wing over her back and closed his eyes for a moment, eternally grateful for her presence.

"Let's go back," she said softly. "You can bring me back here another time."

Back at the shelter, they entered quietly, not disturbing Cinder, who was now carefully tucked up against his sister. True to his word, Hiccup had returned and had propped himself up against the wall next to the young dragons and was fast asleep. The fire was nothing more than embers now. They lay down together, Toothless's body wrapped around hers, and their last thoughts before sleep overcame them were of each other.

\* \* \*

><p>A week passed and Ash's progress was disappointingly minimal. She still spent most of her time unconscious, couldn't stomach more than the smallest amounts of food, and wouldn't- or couldn't- speak to anyone, including her brother. Even the humans, who were ignorant of most dragon communication, noticed her unusual muteness.<p>

After sleeping for a day straight, Toothless found himself revived enough to venture out and attend some of his duties. Cloudjumper had done an excellent job of maintaining order, but there were still issues that only the Alpha could resolve. A few of the wilder young Nightmares had gotten into the fish supply, and needed to be educated on the merits of \_not \_eating the humans' food. The Scuttleclaws, still barely more than the hatchlings they had been when Hiccup, Valka, and the other humans left at the sanctuary had ridden them back to Berk a year and a half ago, had blown up a house while play-fighting, and it was up to Toothless to try and reason with them (which generally meant to \_bribe \_them.)

The Terrible Terrors, normally the root of many disputes, were unusually well-behaved, and he noticed with some mystification that a small flock of them tended to follow Lightning wherever she went, although she never ventured far from the shelter.

Toothless also knew that he needed to catch up with his mate, the sooner the better. Talking things out often helped, even though he always balked at the initial idea of it. He finally got his opportunity about a week after his return, though the circumstances weren't particularly ideal.

It was about midday when Toothless went up to the shelter to check on his Night Furies, as he had started thinking of them. He had never actually been with Ash while she was awake and he wanted to see for himself just how bad her condition was. Cinder was always fun to be around, and Toothless needed no excuse to seek out his mate.

Opening the door, he saw Lightning lounging in the corner, and was surprised to see Hiccup sitting next to her, rambling on about dragons destroying property, for what the human suspected was sheer entertainment. Lightning was nodding, but glanced over at Toothless with a small smile. Toothless was forever grateful that his mate and his best friend got along as well as they did. He still couldn't believe she'd let Hiccup ride on her back.

Over on the side of the room, Cinder was talking quietly to Ash, who could have still been unconscious if not for her bright silvery green eyes, blinking slowly every so often. \_Finally\_, Toothless thought.

He walked up softly behind Cinder, listening carefully to what the young dragon was saying. He seemed to be alternating between telling her about Hiccup and the other humans and asking her to please say something. It was painful for Toothless to see Cinder so distraught, although the smaller Night Fury kept it well hidden as he earnestly worked at pulling his sister back into herself.

Hearing his steps, Cinder turned and said brightly, "Hi, Toothless!"

"Hello Cinder, hello Ash," said Toothless. "I hope you're feeling a little bit better."

"This is Toothless, Ash, the one I was telling you about" started Cinder, but Ash had stiffened, eyes wide as she stared at Toothless.

She started making little gasping noises, and confused, Toothless stepped closer. "Are you alright?" As soon as he moved closer, she immediately pushed herself back, pressing against the wall, breathing rapidly as she stared at him with

"Toothless. Toothless!" Snapping out of his absorption, he realized that Cinder and Lightning were both shouting at him. Behind them, Hiccup was standing, clearly confused.

"Toothless, you're frightening her!" Flinching as though he had been struck, Toothless quickly backed up, heart pounding, before darting out of the room. Behind him, he could hear Lightning and Cinder talking soothingly to Ash, trying to get her to calm down. Hiccup, finally figuring out what had happened, hurried outside after his dragon, only to see Toothless taking off, flying out towards the forest.

\* \* \*

><p>Trailing a claw through the water, Toothless viciously suppressed his feelings, but he couldn't stop the pain emanating from his chest. Looking down at his reflection in the lake, he took in his features, scowling at the loss and confusion there. <em>What did I do?<em>

The cruel voice in his mind happily responded. \_You know exactly what you've done. You're a killer, a cold-hearted murderer, and she can see the darkness in you. Soon they will all see it, and you'll be alone forever.\_

Frustrated, he swiped his entire paw through his reflection and roared, sending birds in the surrounding trees flocking to the sky.

"No need to shout, I'm right here." Spinning around with a growl, he stopped short at the sight of Lightning sitting behind him, her blue eyes watching him knowingly. With a sigh he shut his eyes tight, rocking back onto his haunches, and rubbed a paw against his face. He sensed, rather than heard, her approaching, and resisted sighing again when she pressed her smaller body to his, curling her tail around his lower back.

"What's wrong, Toothless?"

"You know what's wrong."

"Do I?"

"I terrified her. She thought I was going to \_hurt \_her, when I was the one to bring her back with Cinder and Stormfly."

"Well, she didn't know you were the one who saved her. Sheâ€¦ I think she thought you were someone else."

\_Brann. \_The name hung unspoken between them, and they both fervently cursed him in their minds for his existence.

"But it will be okay," Lightning continued. "Cinder calmed her down, and told her you weren'tâ€¦ well, that you weren't going to hurt her, that you brought her here, and that you are the Alpha here. That you protect us all."

Snarling, he stood and stepped away, his back to her. "I'm not some great leader, Lightning. I fail, often, and I question myself every day over my decision to defend this island from the Bewilderbeast. Night Furies aren't the Alpha species. We are powerful, yes. But not great, not natural-born leaders or protectors. I entered into this role for one reason: Hiccup. And what happened? He lost part of his leg because I failed to reach him in time, after \_killing \_my queen. I \_killed \_his father, the beloved Chief of the humans here. And on that island, Cinder nearly died because I failed to sense the danger lurkingâ€¦"

"But he didn't die." She said it softly, but firmly.

"No, because I killed the dragon that attacked him," he said harshly. "In seconds, I tore out its throat without thought or remorse and held it down while it bled to death. \_It. \_I don't even know if it was male or female. I don't know its name. I don't know if it had a family-"

Lightning cut him off. "It was loyal to Brann. It was inherently evil if it even for a moment \_considered \_harming a dragon as young as Cinder. You protected him without thinking. Letting Cinder be hurt didn't even cross your mind as a possibility. And you went with him,

crossing the sea to some unknown land, just to rescue a young dragon who might or might not have even been alive."

Toothless looked at her, his expression inscrutable, before gazing out at the lake. "I met a few other Night Furies while we were over there. They exist in hiding, afraid to leave their caves for fear of being killed themselves by the Serpents that Brann use as his own personal army. One, Holly, was maybe fourteen or fifteen, and she asked me to come back for her and her family, and for all of the Night Furies trapped under Brann's control. When I was fifteen-

"You defeated the Red Death. You changed the worlds of dragons and humans forever, for the better."

"That's not the point," he snapped. "I gave her my word as an Alpha that I would return. Someday, I'm going to go back. Someday, I will be forced to kill again, or be killed, for the sake of protecting innocent dragons."

"And is that not a worthwhile reason to kill? To defend those under your protection?" she cried out. "I would kill for you, Toothless. And you know I would die for you, too."

"I would die a thousand times before I let anything happen to you," Toothless said gravely, turning to pierce her with his luminous gaze.

Lightning resisted the urge to look down. \_He was her \_mate\_, for goodness' sake.\_ "But you have a responsibility, not just to me, but to all dragons now. Like it or not, you are the Alpha, and you are driven to provide and protect for us all, or die trying. Brann has perverted the role of leadership with his tyranny, and someday you and I- yes, I will be with you- will make it right. But for nowâ€¦" she trailed off and approached him again, nuzzling his stiff neck until he relaxed into her touch.

Toothless gazed into her enormous blue eyes and all of his concerns and fears melted away. He pressed his forehead against hers and closed his eyes, remaining there by the lake in the cove until the sun was almost set.

### 30. Chapter 26

She lay in the shelter, breathing shallowly so she wouldn't reopen her deeper wounds. Her wings ached, but she supposed it was better than the pain of when they were actually being broken. It had been a few weeks now, but she had no idea how much time had passed, for she slept often and had difficulty distinguishing night and day.

"Ash?"

\_Cinder.\_ Her brother. He was the reason she was in this mess but she wasn't upset at him, she didn't blame him. It wasn't his fault that the current leader of the Night Furies back home was a maniacal monstrosity of a dragon. No, she had learned a lot while captive under Brann's \_care\_, and one of the things she knew most certainly was that he wanted to hurt others, and that he would have found one

reason or another to hurt her even if he hadn't wanted to control Cinder.

She blinked in response, her small blank face expressing none of her dark thoughts. Her brother approached slowly, cocking his head. "Are you hungry?"

So slightly that he almost didn't see it, she shook her head. She was never hungry, now.

He couldn't disguise his disappointment. "Okayâ€|" he looked around, trying to figure out what to say. The door swung open and they both looked over to see Lightning slowly enter, smiling kindly. Ash actually liked the older Night Fury. She wasn't threatening, and her blue eyes didn't remind her of anyone but Shade, who had always been kind.

"Hello, you two. How are you feeling today?"

"I'm okay," said Cinder, "but Ash isn't hungry, again."

Ash felt somewhat guilty. Caring for her and rescuing her couldn't have been easy, but she couldn't help her lack of interest. She had nightmares when she slept, and she apparently couldn't stand the sight of the dragon responsible for her rescue, which made her feel enormously guilty.

Lightning pulled her out from her thoughts. "You need to eat something, Ash, even if you're not hungry. It will help you feel better." The older Night Fury went over to the fish barrels and pulled out three fish.

Expertly, she beheaded one of them and tossed it to Cinder, while bringing the smallest one back to Ash. Holding her own fish, Lightning settled down next to them and encouraged them to eat. Cinder basically inhaled his, so Lightning gave him half of hers. "Come on, Ash. It's not much, but it will make you stronger," she said encouragingly, before taking a small bite of her half-fish.

Ash looked dubiously at the fish in front of her. She couldn't tell if it smelled good or not, but she didn't want to be rude and ignore it, so she pulled it closer, sniffing it, and hesitantly took a bite.

\_It'sâ€| it was actually really good. \_It was the first fish she had eaten in a long time, since she had been starved by Brann and had essentially subsisted on the human's "dragon tea" and other plant things since arriving on Berk. Suddenly starving, she swallowed it whole, and looked up shyly at Lightning.

The older dragon laughed, delighted, which put Ash at ease, and got up to bring over more fish.

Ash ravenously devoured six more fish before she was full, suddenly sleepy. Still smiling, Lightning told her, "Take a little nap, we'll be back in a while." Nodding slightly, she closed her eyes, and fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

\* \* \*



><p>Toothless had been sleeping outside the shelter. Lightning understood that he didn't want to upset Ash, but didn't like it when he insisted that she sleep inside of the shelter without him. "You need to keep an eye on them," he had said, referring to the two young Night Furies staying with them.<p>

Reluctantly she had agreed, and so he had slept alone outside for almost three weeks. Fortunately the skies had refrained from pouring out water in any of its various forms, and he rarely was bothered by the cold like humans were. He contemplated going to stay with Hiccup, but discarded the idea, wanting to be close to his mate in the event that there was some kind of trouble.

It was about midday, and Toothless was patiently explaining to an older Nadder outside the forge that no, the humans were not planning on betraying them and that no, no one was trying to kill her, when Lightning bounded up with Cinder at her heels. Squawking, the purple Nadder greeted them excitedly, hoping to pick up something to gossip about. The Alpha's mate and his young charge were still new to the island and had captivated the attention of most all the other dragons. The female was undeniably beautiful, but her unusual scars gave her an air of mystery, and the young Night Fury, once forgiven for his effective destruction of property, was found to be a most charming and earnest young male. Now that there was yet \_another\_ Night Fury up in that shelter on top of the hill, who had yet to be introduced to the village, the rumors were more outrageous and thrilling than ever. Who were these young Night Furies? How did Lightning play into all of the strange happenings of late? Where did they all come from?

Toothless was semi-aware of the speculation but found he didn't mind it much. In fact, he had fun fanning the flames on occasion.

"Toothless!" Cinder shouted before jumping onto his back. Cinder wasn't very big compared to him, but was bigger than Hiccup, and the sudden weight caused Toothless to stumble.

"Whoa! What's going on?" he asked the two enthusiastic Night Furies.

Lightning grinned, distracting him, but Cinder yelled excitedly, "Ash ate! She ate a whole bunch of fish!"

While the subject of Ash was still a sore one for Toothless, he couldn't help but be happy about news of her improvement. They really had not thought she would make it.

"That's great news! Did she say anything?"

Sounding slightly less enthused, Cinder wiggled along Toothless's back until he was draped over the larger dragon's head and neck. "No, not yet," he said, then his tone brightened. "But I think she's feeling a lot better."

"Who is Ash?" all three Furies had forgotten about the nosy Nadder, who leaned in, very intrigued.

Toothless sighed. It was only a matter of time before he was going to have to explain the whole Ash situation to the other dragons, but he

wasn't quite ready to divulge everything that had happened over at the other island. Especially not anything to do with Brann.

"Ash is Cinder's little sister, the one Stormfly and I brought back with us a few weeks ago."

"Oh really?" the purple Nadder stepped closer, clearly planning on asking more questions, when they were interrupted by the beating of wings.

With a soft thump, Cloudjumper landed nearby. "Alpha. May I speak with you?"

"If you stop with the Alpha I'll consider it."

The Stormcutter rolled his eyes. "In private, if that's alright?"

Toothless couldn't help the concern that rippled through him. "Of course. Cinder?"

"Ohhkaaayyy," the young dragon huffed, sliding off Toothless's head and landing on his back in the dirt. Without thinking Toothless lifted him up and wiped the dirt off his face. "Ah! Stop it!"

"What, you like being dirty?"

"Maybe!"

Toothless laughed at Cinder and told Lightning that he'd find her later. Excusing himself from the Nadder, who was still eyeing them all with fascination, he turned to Cloudjumper. "Shall we?"

The two flew up to the statue of Stoick and perched in the shaded alcove on top of it. No one would disturb them, there.

"What's going on?" Toothless asked.

"One of the patrols returned this morning, reporting that she had seen movement at the edge of the forest last night."

"Well that's hardly unusual."

"She said it was a strange dragon, one that she had never seen before."

Toothless went cold. "What did the dragon look like?"

Cloudjumper paused. "She said it looked like a large snake with legs."

\_Oh, no. \_

The Stormcutter seemed to sense Toothless's growing alarm. "She said there was only one, and when she returned to the site with another patrol, the dragon was gone."

Toothless didn't know what to say. Finally he choked out, "And no one else has seen anything?"

"Nothing."

Looking out over the village, he thought of all the dragons and humans under his protection. He spotted Lightning and Cinder near the top of the hill, the smaller dragon jumping back and forth animatedly. He thought of Ash, who he had just removed from the horrors of Brann's rule.

Maybe he had brought this upon them all. By denying Brann what he wanted, then going to his island, killing one of his guards and taking one of his prisoners right out from under his nose— if Flame or Brann had somehow figured out that it was Toothless and Cinder who had done it, the evil leader of the Night Furies could- and would- retaliate.

"Cloudjumper," Toothless started. "We need to double- no, triple the patrols. I want guards around the village at all times, day and night. I need your help to lead teams over the entire island, to see if we find any other evidence of unwanted visitors. If Brann has sent them here, if he decides we aren't enough of a threat, he will likely attack without question."

"Of course," the Stormcutter responded. For a few moments they sat in silence, looking out over the bustling village and all of its unsuspecting inhabitants.

"If anything happens to anyone here, human or dragon, because of what I did on that island—" Toothless couldn't finish the thought.

Cloudjumper had heard a rundown of what had happened from Stormfly. Toothless, understandably, didn't want to discuss it. "What's done is done," the Alpha said when questioned.

"I understand, Toothless." Together they flew back out, to find Hookfang and Stormfly, who were responsible for the dragon halves of the patrol teams. Security was about to get a lot tighter, and no one could be told why.

\* \* \*

><p>Another two weeks passed. Lightning had been working with Ash, telling her all kinds of stories about the island and the people and dragons who lived there. The young dragon, like her brother, was initially understandably skeptical about living among humans, but slowly came around, especially once Hiccup and Valka had come in to meet her officially, bearing gifts of fish and dragon nip. She had been frightened of Gobber, but after being soothed by Hiccup, Lightning, and Cinder, she allowed the blacksmith to look at her wings, sort of listening to his accented mumbling but mostly just devouring the fresh fish Hiccup had brought her.<p>

"I think it's about time ye took this little dragon around the village," Gobber announced at the end of his examination. "She needs to start walkin', if she's ever gonna fly again."

With a great deal of effort and encouragement, the humans, Lightning, and her brother helped her get back on her feet, literally, and guided her around the shelter, having her walk and move around constantly during the days to strengthen her weak muscles. Finally

came the day when Lightning and Cinder decided she was ready to be introduced to a few select dragons.

First, Cloudjumper. The large Stormcutter was lounging in the last of the late afternoon sun, as the hustle and bustle of the village died down during the human's dinner time. Valka was with him, and with a pleasantly surprised expression called out, "Lightning! Have you brought a guest along with you?"

Cinder bounded ahead of his sister and Lightning, grinning toothlessly as he began assaulting Cloudjumper with questions. Patiently the Stormcutter smiled and waited for his chance to speak, as Valka walked over to where Ash was hiding behind Lightning. "Hello, lovely ladies!" she crooned as she dropped to one knee, holding out her arms. Without hesitation Lightning rumbled her affection for the human and gently bumped her head into Valka's, sniffing her for dragon nip. "It's so nice to see you out," the human said to Ash over Lightning's shoulder. "You look like you're feeling much better."

Extricating herself from Lightning, Valka, still crouched, slowly made her way to Ash. While she was okay with Valka and Hiccup, Ash couldn't help but feel shy. Gradually though, Valka's non-threatening stance and soft tone soothed her uncertainty, and she approached, wishing briefly that her wings were out of their braces so that they weren't so awkward to hold over her back.

An unexpected purring noise rumbled in her small chest as Valka gently rubbed her face and neck, scratching at a particularly sensitive and ticklish spot under her chin. Lightning looked on, smiling slightly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Valka. "You haven't been introduced to Cloudjumper yet, have you?"

Hearing his name, the large dragon turned his attention from Cinder, who had commenced climbing from his tail to his frilled head. Ash took a good look at him and took a step back.

Both Lightning and Valka laughed at this, trading glances. "There's no need to be afraid of him, he's a bigger softy than our Toothless."

Ash winced, not wanting to think about the mysterious-and-frightening-but-apparently-perfect Toothless. She had gathered that he was avoiding the shelter so as not to frighten her, which made her feel guilty all over again, but she couldn't help her reaction to him. She couldn't change the past.

"Hello," the large Stormcutter interrupted her thoughts, and she started. "You must be Ash. Cinder talks about you all the time. You're looking much improved, I must say."

Shyly, she looked at the ground between her feet. Lightning came up next to her and nudged her with her nose. "Don't be shy. You don't have to talk to any of us, we just want to make you feel more welcome. Cloudjumper is Valka's dragon partner, and he's pretty harmless." Looking up, Ash saw Cloudjumper nodding in agreement, Cinder mimicking the gesture from on top of the Stormcutter's head.

Valka watched the dragons communicating, fascinated by the complexity of their socializing. They seemed to forget she was there, giving her the perfect opportunity to observe. She and Hiccup had several theories on how the dragons conversed, and each was more complicated than the last. They both suspected, though, that they would never fully understand just how developed the dragons' methods of communication were.

"If you ever need anything, I'm always here to help," rumbled Cloudjumper, and Ash felt obligated to nod.

The next day they headed over to the arena early in the day to meet Stormfly and the others. On the way, Cinder spoke animatedly about the Deadly Nadder, Zippleback, Gronkle, and especially the Monstrous Nightmare. "There are so many dragons that we haven't seen before, like Cloudjumper."

Ash couldn't help but be interested. What she didn't know was that Lightning had spoken to the group the night before while she and Cinder were eating dinner, informing them that Ash wasn't speaking yet and that they needed to tone it down as much as possible to make her feel secure. They had all readily agreed, especially Stormfly, who was itching to see the young Night Fury she had helped rescue.

And tone it down they did. Ash, although she did not speak, soon got over her reservations and listened eagerly to Stormfly, Hookfang, Barf and Belch, and Meatlug as they talked a bit about themselves and showed off some of their special abilities, like the Nadder's spikes and the Nightmare's ability to set his entire body ablaze.

Every day she, Lightning, and Cinder took a walk around the village, sometimes with Hiccup or Valka, keeping other dragons and humans at bay so that Ash could learn about life on Berk. Toothless would observe from a distance, making sure to stay out of Ash's sight. She would probably be even more alarmed by him if she knew he was watching her without her knowing. He desperately missed spending time with his mate, but he knew it was important for Lightning to spend time with the younger dragons, so that they could all integrate into the village more fully.

Ash still wasn't making any noise, and the other dragons were starting to lose hope that she would ever speak again, but Cinder refused to give up on her. "She'll talk, just wait. Just wait."

Gradually, the humans and dragons of Berk became used to the three Night Furies, simply greeting them as they passed, rather than crowding them or assailing them with questions. Toothless's fear of retaliation from Brann began to abate, as another week passed with no sign of intruders.

It was peaceful, it was pleasant, and it was not to last.

### 31. Chapter 27

It was mid-morning when they first sighted the black smudge on the horizon.

"Cloudjumper! Something is approaching from the southwest," Stormfly said quickly as she landed next to him.

Immediately, the Stormcutter excused himself from his conversation with the two heads of a blue Zippleback and took to the skies, searching for his Alpha. He wasn't hard to find, standing near the wreckage of a cart full of cabbages, surrounded by four very ashamed-looking, large baby Scuttleclaws.

"What did I tell you about destroying the human's property? Remember what I said about going into the forest to play games? The village is not a playground." The Night Fury's voice was firm, but lacked real anger. Cloudjumper landed nearby, waiting for his Alpha to finish his lecture. Toothless glanced behind him to see his second-in-command, then turned back to the babies. "I know you're probably going to do whatever you want, regardless of what I say, but could you try to leave the humans out of it?"

Two of them weren't even paying attention any more, but the other two nodded and agreed to "try". Toothless waved them away and they took off running, squawking and screeching madly.

Sighing, he turned to Cloudjumper, who looked grim. "What is it now?"

"Something is coming."

"Show me."

They flew to the edge of the docks. Looking out at the horizon, they could easily see a growing cloud of black spots, approaching rapidly.

"What are they?" Toothless asked.

"I don't know. We should send a patrol out to investigate from a distance, then report back to us."

"No, that will take too long. I'll go."

Cloudjumper began to argue but Toothless stopped him. "I'm the fastest. Prepare the dragons. If you see me fire a plasma blast, warn the Vikings as well. I'll do my best to slow them down, if need be."

The Stormcutter nodded, and Toothless leapt into the air, flying out a ways before bringing his wings down hard, exploding forward in the sky.

"Where is he going?" Lightning landed next to Cloudjumper, followed by Stormfly. "What- what is that?" she asked, squinting at the approaching cloud.

"That's what he's going to find out. Where are Cinder and Ash?"

"They're playing with some of the other hatchlings. Well, Cinder is playing, and Ash is watching, but I think it's more because of her wing splints than her not wanting to play."

"That's an improvement. Stormfly," Cloudjumper addressed the Nadder. "Get Hookfang and prepare the dragons. Keep your eyes on the sky, if you see a plasma blast, make sure the dragon riders are prepared as well."

"Will do." The Nadder took off, leaving Lightning and Cloudjumper watching the sky. Slowly, a small crowd of dragons and humans gathered near them, wondering what the cloud could be. Toothless was no more than a speck at this point, and they wondered if he was going to fly right into the cloud when a bright blue light flashed, exploding in the midst of whatever was approaching.

"Find Cinder and Ash," Cloudjumper instructed Lightning, before turning to a nearby Gronkle. "Find Meatlug, tell her Cloudjumper sent you, and that I say to gather the older dragons and the hatchlings and go to the arena until either Toothless or I come and retrieve you. Hurry! Tell everyone you see along the way."

Immediately the dragons sprang into action, Vikings crying out in confusion around them. Roars filled the air, sounding the alarm.

"Cloudjumper!" The Stormcutter didn't need to turn to know that Valka had run up with Hiccup and Astrid. Stormfly flew over, followed by a number of dragons. Landing, she crouched, squawking at Astrid.

"I think she wants me to get on her back," Astrid said with some puzzlement, walking over to her dragon.

"Where's Toothless?" Hiccup asked Cloudjumper. The Stormcutter gestured out to the fast approaching cloud, where another explosion flashed in the sky, much closer to the island. A small black shape could be seen flying around it. "Oh. Astrid!" he shouted. "I need to ride with you!" He ran over to where she was climbing onto her dragon and leapt up behind her, unhooking the hilt of his fire sword from the leg of his flight suit.

Without speaking further, Cloudjumper stood, leaning so that Valka could swing up to stand on his shoulders. They took off towards her and Hiccup's house so that she could collect her armor and staff, needing no words to communicate.

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless fired until he was out of shots, sending many Serpents falling into the sea. For that was who had arrived, a flock of crazed Serpents, their numbers rivaling the population of dragons on Berk. <em>Where did Brann <em>find \_all of these dragons? And what was their purpose in coming here? \_Toothless wondered crossly, dodging a few who flew at him, fangs bared, slashing with their claws. He had angered enough of them to have about a dozen chasing him around, although the rest had continued their mad trajectory for the island, but now that he was out of shots, he was forced to get his paws dirty. Nimble he ducked and flew around them with increasing urgency, carving into their snarling faces with his claws, knowing he needed to get back to Berk but unable to get past the Serpents keeping him busy.

He watched helplessly as the enormous cloud of snakelike dragons

passed over the cliffs of the island and began their assault on the village.

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder couldn't find Ash.<p>

Lightning had found him walking back from playing tag and told him to get his sister and head to the arena as fast as he could, that she would find them there, then took off. Looking up into the sky, his heart filled with a sickening dread as he saw the hundreds of Serpents flying straight for the village.

Led by a masked, staff-wielding Valka and Cloudjumper, the riders of Berk flew up to meet them with roars and war cries, metal weapons flashing as their dragons spewed fireballs into the cloud of invading Serpents.

Desperately, Cinder sprinted through the streets, crying out for his sister and dodging swooping Serpents. Along the way, Hookfang, bearing a hammer-wielding Snotlout, started following him, taking out any Serpent stupid enough to try and attack Cinder as he ran. Above them, dragons, some carrying riders, clashed with the swarm of Serpents. This seemed an awful lot like what Cinder had been forced to do when Flame had brought him here on his mission to collect Lightningâ€¦ \_Oh, no. \_

He wheeled around, almost colliding with the large red Nightmare. "Hookfang! This is a distraction! They're after something here, andâ€¦" his little face grew slack with horror. "It's got to be me, Toothless, Lightning, orâ€¦ ASH!" he cried out, turning and darting away.

"Wait! Cinder!" Hookfang was caught off guard as a Serpent flew down, clawing at his face. Startled, he set himself on fire, forcing Snotlout to leap from his saddle. Another Serpent swooped in, hissing at Snotlout, and the Nightmare slapped the first Serpent out of the air towards the one circling his rider, sending both tumbling away. Extinguishing himself, he ducked to allow Snotlout to clamber back onto his neck, but when he looked around, Cinder was nowhere to be found.

"Hookfang!" Stormfly landed heavily next to him, ridden by Hiccup and Astrid, who were shouting through the din to be heard by Snotlout as they tried to figure out what was happening.

"Stormfly! Cinder just ran off, we need to find him. Something bad is going on, he thinks these Serpent dragons are after him and the other Night Furies, including Toothless!"

"Gotcha!" All three humans cried out in surprise as their dragons took off running down the streets, avoiding the air where other dragons were crashing into each other, fireballs ricocheting through the fray.

\* \* \*

><p>Ash cowered in the back of an alley, pressing herself and her splinted wings against the stone wall. She had fallen asleep in the shade, completely unaware of the approaching danger. The shadows of



midday were not nearly dark enough to disguise her presence, though. Over the sounds of battle and chaos, loud sniffing noises filled the air, drawing closer.<p>

A large head appeared in the opening of the alleyway. Ash realized with a start that its eyes were milky white, blind to the world. But it was still sniffing the air, and suddenly it turned to look straight at her.

Her fear was rising in her throat, and desperately she tried to call for help, but the words just wouldn't come out. Slowly the creature's entire body came into view, and her heart almost stopped.

It was the largest Serpent she had ever seen, bloated and mottled. Most Serpents were green and red but this one was a brownish color, like dried mud. She doubted its small wings would be enough to keep it aloft, and she wondered briefly how it had gotten here. It opened its mouth wide, baring long, razor sharp fangs, and let out a strange roar, not only to intimidate butâ€¦ to call other Serpents to its position.

Screeches in the distance confirmed this, and it turned its head back to her, locking its blind gaze upon her as it stepped closer and closer, hissing.

Again she tried to shout, to cry out, to make \_some \_noise, but nothing came out. \_Come on, come on! \_It opened its mouth again, flicking its tongue in and out, its teeth making a ferocious, twisted grin. "You're not getting away thisss time!" it cackled, its voice sounding strangled and thick.

She sucked in a breath, pressing herself as closely as she could to the wall. The creature came faster, closing the distance between them, stretching its mouth into a terrifying maw. Ash shut her eyes tightly. \_I'm sorry, Cinder. \_

She opened her eyes to see the Serpent bearing down on her, when a dark blur landed in front of her. A terrible roar filled the air, and the black shape leapt at the large creature, knocking it off balance. The black dragon was smaller but more agile, dodging the corpulent Serpent's snapping jaws while slashing with claws and teeth in return.

As they fought bitterly, struggling to gain the upper hand, Ash looked up to see half a dozen Serpents silently crawling down from the tops of the houses they were between, with more behind them.

They all saw her, and hissed evilly, but their primary focus was the black dragon fighting off their tracking and devouring dragon.

\_I have to warn him. \_Something rose in Ash's throat, so strongly that it made her feel sick. The Serpents were halfway down the walls now, followed by another wave of their brethren. Pressure built in her chest, making her heart race even faster, and just when the Serpents were getting close enough to attack, she opened her mouth.

\* \* \*

><p>"<em>LOOK OUT!<em>" a voice screamed, and Toothless whipped around, smacking the blind Serpent as hard as he could with his tail. Behind him a wave of normal Serpents, half a dozen or more, had crawled down from the rooftops, and were preparing to jump him. Ignoring the enraged snarling behind him, he roared as loudly and as menacingly as he could. The Serpents actually paused at this, long enough for him to leap into their midst, biting and slashing his way back to Ash. He could feel their strikes but experienced no pain.

He desperately wished he could fire a plasma blast, but it would be dangerous to attempt in this confined of a space. Finally he got through and used his body to shield the small, cowering Night Fury. "I'm warning you," he growled fiercely at the Serpents that were still standing. "Get back!"

Either they were supremely stupid or they were more afraid of Brann's wrath than his, because they simply hissed loudly and began to move in. More began pouring over the rooftops of the houses to either side of them, and Toothless knew that he had no choice.

Before he could strike, a dark form stepped into the alleyway, and immediately the Serpents quieted, though still poised to attack. \_Whoâ€|? \_

Flame laughed, a deeply unpleasant sound as he came up next to the wounded blind Serpent. \_What was \_he \_doing here?! \_Toothless, unable to control himself, snarled savagely. "You'd better get out of here, Flame. You can't win this."

"You're right. We probably can't win this battle. \_But we will win the war,\_" he hissed, then gestured lazily with one foreleg. "Kill them." Turning, he moved to leave the alley.

Toothless didn't hesitate. Furious, he began charging up the most powerful blast he could, not even noticing the blue glow emanating from his face. Unease was evident in the bloodthirsty Serpents' long faces, but they kept up their advance, crowding in. Toothless waited until enough of them had filled the space, not until it would be fatal to him to fire but close enough. Flame turned back, hearing the telltale whistle, his face uncertain. "What are you-"

Toothless fired, immediately ducking down and wrapping himself up with Ash in his wings. The blast leveled the surrounding houses, obliterating the Serpents, and sent a plume of smoke and fire far into the air.

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning had heard the strange roar, but couldn't identify the source of it. Another Serpent leapt at her, and distracted, she took a blow to the side of her face. Crying out, she stepped back, filled with rage. Cackling, the Serpent came around for another blow when she pounced, ramming her shoulder into its chest and sending it flying back. Coughing, it unsteadily got to its feet and looked at her, before suddenly turning and running away.<p>

"Get back here!" she snarled, pursuing it as it leapt onto a rooftop, blinking as blood trickled into her right eye. \_Where was it going? \_Suddenly she noticed that a number of the Serpents were converging on one house. \_Whatâ€|? \_No, between the houses. Whatever they were

after, it was there. The Serpent she was chasing was several houses away, and leapt into the alley with its brethren. Then she heard the whistle, growing in volume, and she stopped short. \_That sounds likeâ€| \_Her eyes widened and she took a step forward, when the world exploded into light.

## 32. Chapter 28

\*\*Phew. Three chapters in one day. Well, today's a new day, so here's another one! Dedicated to ScarletNightFury for writing the 50\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\* review. Sorry to keep you waiting ;) \*\*

\* \* \*

><p>The force of the explosion knocked Cinder off his feet, and dazed, he looked up at the sky to see dragons and riders forced away by the powerful blast. Serpents were screeching in confusion, but the Vikings regained their composure quickly, rallied by Valka, and they took advantage of the Serpents' disorganization.<p>

In the last six years, the Vikings' natures had turned from dragon slayers to, well, dragon \_lovers. \_But these snakelike dragons were vicious, and seemingly immune to all forms of diplomacy and training. So, to protect their village and their own dragons, the humans did not hesitate to cut down every Serpent that came within reach. The dragons of Berk also showed no mercy, for the Serpents fought bitterly, to the death.

\_Cinder. Cinder. \_"Cinder!" It was Stormfly, with Astrid and Hiccup. Hookfang and Snotlout weren't far behind, dodging falling dragons and Vikings, who would simply get back on their feet, dust themselves off, and jump onto the nearest dragon, weapons and shields raised to re-enter the fray. The sunlit sky was dark with smoke now, embers from the explosion lighting fires all over the village.

"That was Toothless!" shouted Hiccup, sounding frantic. "We have to get over there!"

Unsteadily, Cinder got back on his feet, panic rising in his throat. "We have to find Ash!"

"Toothless will be able to help! Come on!"

The three dragons sprinted towards the source of the blast. They were almost there when Cinder spotted a black form laying next to one of the leveled houses. "Over there!"

It wasn't Toothless. Blood dripped down from a cut over her right eye, and the rest of her body looked scraped up as well. "Lightning?"

She didn't stir, and Cinder froze, unable to comprehend the possibilityâ€| Behind him, the humans were shouting, then Hiccup and Astrid ran past him to check on the female Night Fury.

"Lightning!" Hiccup shouted, one hand on her neck and the other hovering over her nose. "Oh, thank gods. She's breathing. She's alive!"

Cinder realized he had been holding his breath. He darted forward, placing a paw on her shoulder, and did his best to shake her. "Lightning, you have to wake up. Toothless and Ash are in danger! We need you. Wake up!"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Wake up!<em>

Lightning groaned, her entire body incredibly stiff and sore. The blast had blown her off the rooftop and through the wall of a neighboring house, which was promptly destroyed by the flames of the explosion. Blinking, the world slowly came into focus, and suddenly the sounds of battle washed loudly over her, waking her fully.

Cinder was watching her anxiously, sitting in front of her, with Hiccup and Astrid next to him. Behind them, Stormfly, Hookfang, and his rider Snotlout were waiting. Snotlout called out to them, "Okay, great, she's awake. Now come on! We've got another Night Fury to find!"

"Okay," she grunted to Cinder, slowly tensing her muscles to stand. They ached, but once she was up, she checked and found that nothing was broken, including- thankfully- her wings.

"We have to find Ash and Toothless!" Cinder shouted to her, and together they all ran past the ruins of the last few houses to the smoky crater of the blast site, leaving Hookfang and Snotlout to keep the Serpents at bay.

"Ugh, what is that \_smell\_?" coughed Astrid.

It was the stench of burnt flesh. Dragons were mostly fireproof, but plasma blasts were much more powerful than regular dragon fire, and could burn even the thickest of dragon hides. Besides certain types of especially large dragons, only Night Furies could withstand the heat of their own blasts, but even they were hard-pressed to escape unscathed from a direct shot.

The charred corpses of Serpents were still smoking. But through the gray haze and glowing embers, near what used to be a retention wall in the hillside, a faint blue light was radiating through a pile of rubble.

"Toothless!" Hiccup gasped, stumbling into the small crater and scrambling up the other side to try and reach the heap of scorched wood and collapsed rock. He didn't care that he was probably ruining the leather of his flight suit. He was pulling himself up over the edge of the hole in the ground when the earth crumbled beneath his grip and he began sliding backwards. "Whoa!" But something caught him. Looking down, he saw Lightning's blue eyes, and grimly nodded his thanks. With her help he clambered the last few feet and desperately began shoving away splintered beams and pushing rocks off the pile.

Above them, the Vikings and dragons of Berk had finally gained the upper hand, and had begun driving away the tide of Serpents, whose numbers had easily been halved.

Finally they uncovered a smooth expanse of black scales. Lightning's eyes widened, and she took a small step back, unsure of what she was seeing. Her mate's spine was glowing blue, his wings wrapped around his body. "Toothless!" she cried, frantically clearing away the last of the wood and stone. His back and wings were slightly burned, but most of the damage had come from the debris that had buried him.

"Lightning?" a muffled voice called out from within the cocoon of Toothless's wings.

"Toothless?"

"No! I'm kind of trapped in here, can you get me out?"

Hiccup and Lightning exchanged startled glances at the voice. The human obviously didn't understand what was being said, but he knew the sound wasn't coming from his dragon. Carefully, Hiccup reached over and slowly pulled one of Toothless's wings away from his body, revealing

"Ash!" Cinder cried out, quickly flying over the crater and landing next to Lightning. "Ash! Are you okay?"

The small Night Fury was wrapped in Toothless's embrace, tucked close to his body. Her silvery green eyes blinked at him, apparently none the worse for wear. "I think so, but Toothless broke the wing splints when he grabbed me."

"Are your wings alright? Do they hurt? Wait! you're talking! Ash! You're talking!" Cinder exclaimed, hopping up and down.

"My wings are okay, a little stiff, but they don't hurt. His heart is beating, in case you were wondering," she added.

Lightning was torn between excitement for Ash, concern for the battle still taking place, and deep worry for her mate. Hiccup leaned in, placing his hand on Toothless's head, which was tucked in close to Ash, blue light emanating from his nose. His eyes were shut tight in an unconscious grimace. "Bud, you've got to wake up. There's some serious fighting going on and we need your help. Please, Toothless."

Slowly, the blue light faded from his spine and face, and a groan rumbled in his chest. "Oh, Toothless," Lightning choked.

"Toothless, wake up," Ash said to him earnestly. "You're alright."

A bright green eye blearily opened, blinking slowly. "What happened?"

"You blew up half the street and started fires all over the village," said Cinder helpfully.

"You roasted a bunch of Serpents."

"You saved me," said Ash quietly. Realizing he was holding the young Night Fury, he immediately loosened his grip on her, terrified that he might be frightening her.

Seeming to understand, Ash placed a small paw on his nose. "I'm not afraid of you any more."

A toothless grin spread across his face, and Ash giggled. Lightning's heart melted, and Cinder puffed up, pleased that his sister's fear had been satisfactorily resolved.

"Isn't this nice," a harsh voice sounded. Whirling around, Lightning could see behind Stormfly and Astrid a dark form hauling itself clear of a pile of debris.\_ Flame. \_

"\_You!\_" she hissed, spreading her wings to leap across the crater and street. "How \_dare \_you come here!"

The vile dragon began to laugh, but was cut off by a wracking cough. "What did you expect?" he spat. "Brann didn't take kindly to your \_mate\_ invading his territory and taking one of his prisoners."

"Why are you on Berk again? Obviously you didn't plan on some great victory here!" Lightning wanted to hear from the bastard what the plan had been.

Flame clearly didn't have a problem sharing information. "Obviously not," he said, still leaning on the ground. He had been behind the Serpents when Toothless had fired, but was still blown backwards into the house behind him, and he was pretty sure he had a few broken ribs, along with some freely bleeding cuts along his body and wings. "We came to kill her, and if possible, finish off her brother, your precious \_Toothless\_, and you, if you were unwilling to return with us. The tracking Serpent nearly had them bothâ€¦| "

"Well, it failed," she snapped. "And so have you. Any last words?"

"Would it be too late to say, 'Behind you'?"

"Lightning!" Cinder shrieked.

She whipped around just in time to see a Serpent swoop down and collide with her, throwing her off her feet. Kicking it off, she barely escaped being bitten by its dripping fangs. \_They didn't breathe fire, but they \_were \_poisonous. \_Mercilessly she leapt after it, claws extended, but Stormfly got there first, pinning it with a row of spikes from her tail and blasting it with a stream of white hot fire. The Nadder darted forward to finish the screeching dragon off, and Lightning turned back to see Flame take off, his injured wings barely supporting him.

"Oh no you don't!" she shrieked, and leapt into the air as he passed over her, slashing at his face with her claws.

He screamed, a terrible sound, but kept flying. Lightning fell back to the ground and prepared to take off after him when a voice stopped her.

"Let him go." It was Toothless, struggling to get to his feet. "Stormfly," he called out. "It's dead. You can stop now." The Nadder looked down at the remains of the dragon she stood on and immediately stepped off, wiping her feet in the dirt.

Seething, Lightning obeyed, staring angrily after Flame as he wobbled through the smoky sky, calling the remaining Serpents to him. The snakelike dragons disengaged from their own personal battles with Berk's dragons and riders, withdrawing after their superior.

The Vikings cheered loudly, and their dragons shot fireballs at the backs of the retreating Serpents, felling several more.

Scowling as she turned back to Toothless and the others, Lightning vowed that someday, she would see Flame dead.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I <em>think <em>we might be coming around to the home stretch here, friends. Next few chapters should give us some idea. Keep reading, we've got well over 11,000 views now, which is \*\*\*\*delightful.\*\*\*\*</strong></p>

\*\*I go back to school in a few days, which might mean longer periods between updates, but I'll do my bestest. Thinking about a sequel... let me know what you think about \_that.\_\*\*

### 33. Chapter 29

\*\*Hello, friends! Sorry this took me so long! I've been plotting out the chapters to come and getting back in the groove of escuela. Thanks for being patient with me! I'm not sure yet how often I'll be able to update but I'll do my best to do so at least once a week. \*\*

\*\*Review, and let me know about that sequel. I've got some neat ideas for it but I honestly need some encouragement to get started. \*\*

\* \* \*

><p>The villagers and dragons immediately set to putting out fires and tending to wounded Vikings and dragons.</p>

After getting up and inspecting the debris, Toothless found the shriveled corpse of the enormous Serpent, much to Hiccup's shock, and, thankful for its demise, hauled its remains off the island himself and dumped it in the sea. Now, he sat at the top of the hill next to Cloudjumper, overseeing the cleanup in the late afternoon sun as Hiccup smeared salve on the burns and cuts on his body.

The Chief had been dodging questions about the attack all afternoon. He had suspicions about where the snakelike dragons had come from, and was certain their appearance had everything to do with the small Night Fury Toothless had brought to Berk so many weeks ago. But he had no way to prove any of it, and so he waited to discuss the matter further with his mother.

"What I want to know is how that giant Serpent and Flame managed to get into the village without us seeing them," Toothless contemplated.

"I'll have Stormfly and Hookfang look into it with the patrols. In the meantime, do you know what you want done with the dead

Serpents?"

"They don't deserve the honor of a proper burial. No, we'll drop them out into the ocean for hungry sea dragons to take care of."

"And what of the fallen dragons here? Only a few lost their lives in the battle, mostly due to multiple bites from the Serpents' poisonous fangs."

"Who fell?"

"Red and Blue, the green Zippleback; Snap, the young male Nightmare who generally seemed to be the ringleader in all the incidents involving the younger dragons; Pin, a yellow Nadder; and Slagg, a Gronkle."

"We will honor them with our fire, as is the custom." Toothless was greatly saddened by the deaths of the four dragons, but was thankful that no others had perished. Many more were injured, but incredibly enough, no Vikings had died, only sustaining injuries from the invading Serpents and simply falling from the sky.

Toothless refused to feel remorse over the Serpents he had killed. They were clearly a malicious and vile bunch, and in this circumstance he was free of the guilt he normally felt about taking lives.

\_They aren't the only ones who are doomed to fall,\_ he thought darkly. Brann and Flame had crossed yet another line, but this time it was deeply intolerable.

"What do you want to do?" Cloudjumper cut into his musing.

Toothless knew what he was asking. Were they going to retaliate? Were they going to return to the colony of Night Furies and seek vengeance against Brann?

"We will stay here. Fortify our defenses, and care for our own. These are the dragons I need to worry about right now."

Cloudjumper nodded, understanding. The Alpha had mentioned that he had sworn to return to the other island and take down Brann, but it wasn't the right time. They both hoped, though, that inaction would not serve to further Brann's infliction of injustice upon innocent dragons.

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning wandered through the village, helping random Vikings and dragons move rubble and salvage what they could from destroyed homes. She heard comments several times regarding dragon attacks "just like the old days" and wondered if the Vikings ever missed the times of kill or be killed.<p>

"Lightning!" Turning, she saw Valka jogging after her. "Shall we go up and check on our boys?"

Rumbling her agreement, Lightning walked at the human's side through the ravaged streets, stepping around the corpses of Serpents and smoldering debris.



"I bet you know who's responsible for this madness," Valka said conversationally.

Lightning nodded.

"And I bet it has something to do with those two younger Furies and yourself."

She hesitated, before nodding again.

"I've seen dragons like that before. Serpents. Nasty pieces of work, to be sure. I've never seen them in such great numbers, so coordinated. Normally they can't help but fight among themselves, vying for dominance and territory. Something tells me someone is running the show behind the scenes, here."

Lightning "mmm"ed in agreement, but Valka was lost in her thoughts. "But what did they want?" she muttered to herself. Suddenly her eyes widened and she turned to Lightning. "The Serpents were a distraction!"

Not waiting for a response, she continued to flush out her thoughts. "If the Serpents were the distraction, who was responsible for the primary goal?"

Lightning wished desperately that humans could understand dragon speech, but before she could try to communicate, Valka seemed to stumble upon another realization. "Was it that Night Fury we met that day in the meadow? The male with yellow eyes?"

\_Yes. \_Valka was really quite perceptive. Maybe it had something to do with spending twenty years among dragons and no one else.

"Is he the one in charge of this whole thing?"

Lightning shook her head, and the human brought her hand to her chin, rubbing her thumb against her lip thoughtfully. "So it's an unknown party controlling an army of serpents, with a Night Fury as a servant. Is it another Night Fury?"

The female dragon nodded again, and then they arrived at the top of the hill, where Hiccup was finishing up tending to Toothless.

"Bud, it looks like your tail got a bit banged up. I'll try to get one made in the next day or so." As an afterthought, he added, "Did you like the black, or would you prefer red?"

"Red," said Toothless decisively, but all Hiccup heard was a rumble.

"Riiight" the human said. "Just come by the forge at some point and pick one out. Hey, Mom."

Valka had walked over to where Cloudjumper was lounging and had begun rubbing his neck. "I've been discussing the day's events with Lightning, here," she said casually.

"Discussing? With Lightning?" Hiccup's tone dripped with disbelief.

"Oh, yes! She's been quite helpful in unraveling the mysteries regarding the younger Night Furies and today's attack."

"Umâ€¦"

Valka laughed, leaving Hiccup more confused than ever. "She either indicates yes or no. But it requires a fair bit of creative thinking to come up with the right questions."

"That'sâ€¦ that's amazing!" Hiccup was delighted that he might actually get to know what was really happening in his dragon's life. "Creative thinking, huh? What did you ask her? Or, rather, what did you find out?"

"Well, Lightning confirmed that the nasty business today had to do with the younger Furies and herself, and that the Serpents were just a distraction, while the real intention was far more devious. I'm not sure what that intention was, but she also confirmed that the Night Fury, the yellow-eyed one from the meadow all that time ago, was here, trying to achieve that goal."

"That's right!" Hiccup looked stunned. "He was in the wreckage near where we found Toothless. Lightning approached him, and it seemed like they were talking to each other, until a Serpent swooped down from behind her and nearly took her out. Bud," he said, turning to his dragon. "That Night Furyâ€¦ was he here to hurt you? Any of you?"

Toothless looked grim as he nodded.

"Whoaâ€¦" Hiccup brought his hands up to the sides of his head. "This is far more complicated than I think any of us could have imagined. But they let him go, the yellow-eyed Fury. Why would they do that?"

"I don't know, son. I imagine they had their reasons, one of them perhaps being that our dragons are kind-hearted, and killing members of their own species in cold blood runs against their nature."

"Maybe," Hiccup pondered, absentmindedly rubbing his hand along Toothless's shoulder. "I wonder if-

"Chief! Chief Hiccup!" A group of villagers approached from downhill.

Sighing, Hiccup patted Toothless's neck. "Well, Mom? What do you say we face this together?"

"Of course, son." Together they walked down to meet the Vikings, who were covered in dirt and soot.

Cloudjumper glanced at Lightning before excusing himself. "I'll go check on the movement of the young and old humans and dragons back from the arena."

After the Stormcutter flew off, Lightning sniffed at the salve on Toothless's back. It was a pleasant scent, very relaxing. "How are

you feeling?" she asked him.

"Like a house fell on me." She almost laughed. "How are \_you \_feeling?" he continued.

"I'm okay. Almost everyone is okay, which is what matters. Butâ€¦" she paused, uncertain of how to continue. "Why didn't you let me kill Flame?"

"What good would it have done?"

"Well, it would have shown Brann that we aren't so easily defeated, for one thing. He'd think twice about sending any more dragons after us."

"We decimated the Serpents' numbers, killed their tracking dragon, and wounded Flame enough to send him running. Not to mention that I'm pretty sure you took out his eye. No," he said. "I think we are safe for now."

"For now," she snapped, growing frustrated. "They were here to kill Ash and Cinder, Toothless. As well as you and me, if given the opportunity. And they almost had you, from the looks of it. You were \_lucky\_ to have survived!"

"I'm just a lucky dragon, looks like."

"Don't make light of this. Brann will never give up. And now he has targeted all of Berk, because of me, because of you, and because of the kids."

"Lightning, what would you have me do?" he cried, standing. "Should I fly after them and take them all on myself? I'm not willing to put any more lives on the line, not today. We lost four dragons, imagine how much worse it could have been! We were \_all \_lucky, so very lucky." Softening, he moved closer to her, and she closed her eyes, still upset. "For now, we will rebuild, and we will move on. We will be ready, if he tries anything again. The day will come when I return to the colony and make good on my promise to the other Night Furies, but today is not that day. I need to look after Cinder and Ash, and the rest of the dragons, and all the humans. Look at me," he said, and she obeyed. "I can't do it without you, love."

"I don't want anyone else to be hurt," she whispered.

Toothless moved around to sit next to her, pressing his side into hers and draping a wing over her back. "We can't save everyone, but we can do our best to try and keep them safe and happy for as long as possible."

\* \* \*

><p>About a week after the attack, Stormfly and one of the patrols reported that they had discovered signs of recent activity in the caverns below the village. <em>So that's where Flame had been hiding, <em>thought Toothless. He ordered patrols to stay on their guard and make sure to examine all supposedly uninhabited locations on the island regularly.

Another month passed uneventfully as the Vikings and dragons worked

to rebuild the village. Gobber and Hiccup had constructed new, smaller splints for Ash's healing wings, which had fortunately not been harmed during the attack. Hiccup also had replaced the black material on Toothless's prosthetic with the bright red they both preferred.

Lightning was lounging on the roof of the shelter, basking in the midday sun. Below her, Cinder and Ash had been in the process of devouring a barrel of fresh fish. That is, until the Terrible Terrors showed up. Somehow a mad food fight had broken out, and now Lightning watched with infinite amusement as fish flew between the small, screeching dragons. Leaning out, she snagged a stray cod out of the air and began chewing on it thoughtfully.

"All right, all right," she called down between bites. "That's enough. Ash, Cinder, are you quite finished?"

The two young Night Furies glanced up at her, each taking a fish to the face as a reward for their distraction. Lightning couldn't help but laugh out loud. "Spike! Can't you control your friends?" she yelled down at the Terror who had joined her on the roof so long ago while she waited for Toothless to bring Ash back.

"Sorry, Lightning, but they don't listen to me!" he squeaked.

"Ugh, fine." Tossing the rest of the fish into her mouth, Lightning smoothly jumped off of the roof, landing in the middle of the fray. "All right, all-" A fish smacked her right between her eyes. "Oh, so that's how you want to play, huh? Very well!" With an exaggerated roar, she whipped around, scooping up fish and dumping them on a cluster of the brightly colored dragons gathered around the knocked over barrel. Laughing victoriously, she expertly tossed three more fish, each hitting another Terror, until she finally turned to Ash and Cinder, who looked both thrilled and nervous. An evil grin spread on her face, and she gathered up a small pile of fish to fling at the young dragons when-

"Get her!" With that, the entire flock of Terrors leapt out of the fish and landed on Lightning. Distracted, she turned her head to look back at the mass of wriggling dragons, when something collided with the bottom of her chest, sending her tumbling backwards into the pile. Scurrying out of the way, the Terrors began gathering the fish for themselves as Cinder wrestled with Lightning.

"Submit!" he shouted, batting her face with a fish.

"Never! \_Gah!\_" he smacked her in the eye.

"Hey!" shrieked Ash. "Get back here!" Looking over, Cinder and Lightning saw her scoop up a fish and lob it at two Terrors attempting to haul away a fish twice their size. The fight resumed with full force, everyone laughing hysterically in between growls and high-pitched roars.

"You know, I've heard of flying fish, but I never thought I'd actually see them," said a familiar voice.

Everyone froze, turning their heads to see Toothless watching them with an amused expression on his face. From her upside-down position on the ground, Lightning could see Cloudjumper sitting behind him,

looking slightly stunned.

"Toothless! Catch!" Cinder hurled a fish straight at the Alpha's face. At the last second, when it seemed like it would smack him in the head, Toothless opened his mouth wide and swallowed it whole. The young Night Furies cheered, bringing a smile to Toothless's face.

"Okay, all of you. I expect these fish to disappear by the time Lightning and I get back, understand?"

"Get back? Where are we going?" He smiled again at the sight of his mate on her back, three Terrible Terrors sitting on her stomach.

"I think you're going to need a bath."

"Ah." While all dragons enjoyed fish, they didn't particularly want to smell like them. Shaking off the Terrors, Lightning rolled to her feet. "All right, you heard the Alpha. Start eating, or hoarding, or whatever it is that you Terrors do with fish." Turning to look at Ash and Cinder, who looked like they wanted to run, she said, "And as for you two, when Toothless and I get back, guess whose bath time it is."

"No!" they both cried out.

"If you don't get cleaned up, you're not sleeping in the shelter tonight."

"\_Fine\_."

Lightning turned to see her mate conversing with Cloudjumper, who seemed to have gotten over his bewilderment. With a nod, the Stormcutter backed away to spread his wings and take off, silhouetted against the sun.

"Shall we?" he asked, tilting his head in her direction.

"We shall."

\* \* \*

><p>Landing in the cove, Lightning stepped into the cool water, before licking her paw to groom her face. Without warning something hot and wet slid from her shoulder, up her neck, to behind her ear. Whipping around, she saw Toothless licking his lips. "Tasty," he said, smiling.<p>

"Hmmpf." She dove beneath the surface, swimming out into the middle of the lake. Silver fish darted out of her way as she slid through the water. When she looked back, a pair of large green eyes blinked at her inches behind the tips of her tailfins.

Coming up for air, the two Night Furies circled each other, moving closer and closer until their bodies overlapped in their spiral. Her blue eyes met his sparkling green gaze and they both smiled slightly, understanding each other perfectly.

Later, both feeling pleasantly worn out, they returned to the village, noting that there was no trace of the earlier fishcapade.

After finding the sticky Cinder and Ash, all four of them went to a nearby stream and rid themselves of the last of the fish smell.

Afterwards, rather than return to the shelter, the four decided to head down to the feeding station, where they were greeted excitedly by the dragons gathered there. Stormfly was there, along with Meatlug, and they stood across the bowl from the Night Furies, making conversation in between fish.

Toothless realized that he was being jostled, and for a moment was disconcerted. Then, a warm feeling spread through his chest, as he remembered how frustrated and alone he used to feel at meal times, and he reflected on how much had changed. Looking down, he saw Ash standing on her hind legs to reach over into the large bowl of fish, her wing splints gently knocking together. Next to her, Cinder was attempting to eat the same way the other dragons were, but was just a bit too short to properly get his neck over the rim. Finally, Lightning, whose scars were unnoticeable to Toothless. Without alerting the smaller dragon, she edged a few fish closer to Cinder, who immediately gobbled them up.

Her eyes met Toothless's and she smiled, unsure as to why he was watching her. But it didn't make her uncomfortable. Rather, it heated up her face, and made her heart beat faster. Shyly, she looked down, still smiling, and pushed a few fish in the direction of a straining Cinder.

"I could've reached!"

"I was getting bored," she replied.

Across from them, Stormfly, Meatlug, and a few of the other dragons watched this tableau, and were stricken by how much like a family they behaved. Cinder and Ash were too old to be Toothless's and Lightning's hatchlings, and everyone knew it, but that didn't stop the two older Night Furies from taking care of the younger dragons. \_It was good practice for them\_, mused Stormfly. The way things were going between them, she wouldn't be surprised if there weretwenty new Night Furies on Berk after this Snoggleto.

After everyone had eaten their fill and most of the dragons had begun drifting away, Toothless decided to take them all to the cliffs to watch the sunset. \_Why not? \_he figured. \_I'm already soft in the head when it comes to these three.\_

The sun set, turning the sky a deep orange and sending rays of fire across the sea. The sound of uneven footsteps disturbed them, and all four dragons turned to see Hiccup emerging from the path leading to the village. Grinning toothlessly, Ash and Cinder bounded over to him, and the human dropped to his knees to rub their heads and scratch under their chins.

"Hey, guys," he addressed all of them. Unable to resist, Toothless and Lightning padded over to him as well, gently bumping their heads against his. Hiccup laughed as Ash crawled up the front of his suit into his arms. "It's good to see you too!"

"Listen, bud," he said, talking to Toothless while still petting the other three Night Furies. "You remember when I asked Astrid to marry

me?"

Toothless nodded. He had wondered several times what had happened with that, but just assumed it was a human thing to wait.

"Well, we've finally set a date, or whatever the women say when someone decides to get married. So, two weeks from today. I was wondering ifâ€¦ well, I was wondering if you wouldn't mind being in the ceremony. It only seems right, after everything. You're just as much a part of my life as Astrid is, and she understands that. So she's asking Stormfly to be in it, too. What do you think?" he finished anxiously.

Toothless had witnessed several human weddings during his time on Berk, and was semi-aware of what they entailed. Mostly he just sat in the back with the other dragons and daydreamed. But this was Hiccup's ceremony.

"Yes," he said.

Hiccup heard the affirmative rumble and a wide grin broke out on his face. "Thank you so much, Toothless! Astrid will be so excited. I'll let you know soon what you'll be doing." Gently setting Ash back on the ground, he looked at her wing braces and commented, "I think it's almost time for those to come off, young lady. What do you think?"

Ash couldn't speak, and Hiccup correctly interpreted her hesitant hope. "Don't worry, it'll work out. We'll get you back in the air."

With that promise, the human waved his goodbyes and headed back to the village, leaving the Night Furies more excited than they had been in a while. Cinder immediately started talking animatedly about what he and Ash would do once she was airborne again, and Lightning turned to Toothless and rested her head on his shoulder. Ash simply looked after Hiccup, hope etched on her features, before turning back to Toothless with a questioning look on her face.

"Don't be afraid to hope, Ash. Hiccup got me back in the air after I lost my tailfin. If he says you'll fly again, you will. Just give him some time," Toothless encouraged her. Without speaking, Ash simply walked over to where he and Lightning sat and pressed her face against his foreleg. Cinder's speech had died down and together they all turned and watched as the sun slid below the horizon.

#### 34. Chapter 30 Pt 1

**\*\*Here's some fluff. You know me by now.\*\***

**\*\*Also, I've started writing the sequel. I couldn't resist. I think it's gonna be big, so look forward to that in the coming months :)\*\***

**\* \* \***

><p>The next two weeks passed quickly. Fall had come to Berk, bringing with it chilly nights and the beauty of changing leaves. All of Toothless's time was spent spurring the lazier dragons into

action, forcefully encouraging them to support the humans as they gathered and stored food for the coming freeze, even though the days were still mostly warm and temperate.<p>

"What is a wedding, Toothless?"

He turned from his position at the top level of the docks to see his mate approaching. "It's the humans' way of officially becoming mates, I suppose."

"Do they have to prove themselves worthy?"

"Sometimes. It all depends. Hiccup saved Berk twice, so he has proven his prowess in battle as well as his formidable intellect. Not to mention his inventiveness and skill as a blacksmith. He and Astrid have had something of an understanding since he defeated the Red Death. No one really questioned that they would end up as mates after that."

"He couldn't have saved his people without you," she pointed out.

"That may be true," he said, giving her a smile. "But it's not important. Those things don't make me any worthier as a mate."

"Not to me, no. Most dragons would die just to say they even tried to defeat a Queen, let alone take on an Alpha Bewilderbeast and survive. One would have to be an imbecile to not see the value of those accomplishments. But I don't care what you've done," she said. "Well, let me rephrase that. I am awed by what you have done, but that's not why I am your mate. It's what's on the inside, Toothless, and you're worth your weight in dragon nip for who you are and nothing else."

"I appreciate it. But let's not forget you, hmm?" He moved closer, coming to sit next to her. "I am awed by you, every day. You are very special, and not just because I have decided to treat you that way. You've dealt with the adversity of losing your identity and ending up on a strange place. You've overcome your fear of humans, you've cared for Ash and Cinder as if they were your own family, and you've faced your enemies with strength and determination. And you've got an excellent sense of humor, which in all honesty would be enough to keep me attached to you for a lifetime."

If dragons could blush, Lightning would definitely be bright red. "You're not so bad, either. A little corny, but you'll do," she teased. Resting her head on his shoulder, they watched as Vikings sailed in and out of the harbor, casting out their lines and letting their dragons dive beneath the surface to drive fish right into the nets.

A soft thump on the ground alerted them to Cloudjumper's arrival.

"Any trouble?" Toothless asked, turning around to face his second-in-command.

"None. Valka has had me and some of the other larger dragons helping the Vikings make a clearing in the forest, chopping down trees and hauling the logs away, then pulling up the stumps to level the



ground."

"They're really doing it outside, then? Most weddings take place in the Great Hall. Especially at this time of year."

"Well, they want it to be special. Apparently some of the neighboring human tribes are sending dignitaries to attend the festivities to show their support for the Dragon Chief, as I've heard him called."

"The Dragon Chief, eh? Has a nice ring to it, I suppose."

"It's a bit more fitting than Hiccup, at this point in time," replied Cloudjumper. "I just wanted to let you know that I've sent some of the patrols around the island to round up some of the wild boars, and help the humans higher up the mountain with their harvests."

"Excellent. I'm glad to hear that there hasn't been any mischief."

"At least there was none brought to my attention. That doesn't mean there aren't pranks and delinquency afoot among the younger dragons, not to mention that the Terrors have been unusually docile this past week. Which usually means that they are up to something."

"I suppose we will deal with them when they decide to abandon their good behavior. And what can we do about the younger dragons when the young humans are up to the same kinds of nonsense? As long as no one gets hurt, I don't have a problem with them."

Lightning observed Toothless and Cloudjumper as they discussed the day's work and the doings of the dragons on Berk. Her mate seemed to be more comfortable in his role as Alpha than ever, and made sure to deal with every issue, not just the larger, more demanding situations, but the smaller, sometimes petty concerns as well.

While she had made it clear that his being Alpha was not of any great interest to her, she knew that he wouldn't be the Toothless she loved if he hadn't chosen to do the things he had done. Protecting Hiccup at all costs, taking on impossible odds on a regular basis- it was who he was. His devotion, curiosity, intelligence, and bravery made him both unique and incredibly irresistible.

And once again, the image of a cluster of green-eyed Night Fury hatchlings passed through her mind, and she had to resist the urge to sigh and smile dreamily. She knew she wanted to have a family with him, wanted it more than anything else. But it just didn't seem like the right time yet. Toothless had been so busy lately, not to mention the threat of Brann still lurking in the shadows. \_Someday\_, she hoped. \_Someday soon.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Finally, the day arrived.<p>

Not the day that Lightning was waiting for, but a big day, nonetheless.

Hiccup and Astrid's wedding began as a small affair, but soon swelled

into a festivity the likes of which had never been seen on Berk before. The dragons watched with great interest as the villagers set up an arch in the large clearing they had recently created a little ways into the forest, the men dragging out benches while the women arranged flowers and hung them from the trees and positioned them along some kind of walkway up the middle.

"What are they doing?" Cinder asked curiously, hanging upside down from a branch next to Lightning as they observed the proceedings from up in a large pine tree.

"I'm not sure," she replied. "Toothless said that Hiccup and Astrid were going to become mates officially, however that works. He said they don't need to demonstrate their commitment, as it is already well known, but I still wonder if they might do something interesting anyways."

The beating of wings signaled Toothless's arrival, just before he gently set himself down on a branch behind her. Ash clung to his back, her wings hanging loosely at her sides. According to Gobber, they were fully healed, but very weak. Hiccup and Valka had been coming up with ideas for "therapy" as they called it, to try and get her up in the air again. For now, though, the young Night Fury seemed content to hitch rides with larger dragons, who couldn't resist her adorable silvery green gaze. So far, she only used this power for good, but Toothless worried that it was only a matter of time before she owned every dragon and human on the island.

"Toothless! Ash!" Cinder flipped himself off of his branch and nimbly clambered over to where they rested.

"Careful, Cinder," Lightning cautioned. "These branches are sturdy but I'm not so sure that they can handle all of you at once."

"Are you calling me fat?" Toothless said with mock outrage. From his shoulders Ash giggled.

"Not that it matters to me, but I'm not the one emptying the fish barrels every evening."

"That's Cinder!" Toothless pointed an accusing claw at the younger male.

Cinder shrugged. "I'm a growing dragon. I have to eat."

"See?" said Toothless.

"Okay, okay," Lightning placated him. "You're not fat." She leaned over and poked his side gently with a claw. "Just a little squishy."

"Ash," Toothless spoke quietly, but there was fire in his eyes. "I think I need to have a discussion with Lightning, here."

With another giggle, the small Night Fury jumped off his back to perch next to Cinder, who could barely suppress his laughter.

Slowly, Toothless brought his back legs up to the branch, looking frighteningly predatory as he stared at Lightning. She unconsciously

swallowed. "Okay, maybe I was just exagg-" He pounced, and with a shriek, she jumped backwards, slipping off the edge of her branch. Pivoting in mid-air, she landed on a lower bough on the neighboring tree. When she looked back up to where Toothless had jumped, all she saw were some falling leaves. Higher up, she spied the two younger Night Furies, laughing hysterically. "Oh, so you think this is funny?" she called up to them.

"Extremely," said a voice in her ear, and with another shriek she lost her balance and fell down to the next branch, landing on her back. Above her, she saw Toothless hanging by his tail, a victorious grin on his face.

"What have I told you about \_SCARING ME?\_" she shouted, and his grin faded as she twisted back to her feet.

"Uhâ€|" was all he got out before she leapt upwards, barely missing the tip of his ear as he crunched upwards to evade her claws. Allowing himself to swing back down, he shouted, "Wait, I'm supposed to be the mad one, here!" But she had that evil glint in her eyes, and Toothless realized that he had approximately half a second before-

\_SMACK!\_ Both of her front paws collided with the sides of his neck, and before he could try to escape she pushed off her branch and wrapped all four legs around his body until they were both hanging upside down, Toothless's tail supporting them as they swung back and forth.

"You do realize," he said conversationally, "That this branch was holding my weight just fine, until-"

"Are you calling me \_fat?\_" she hissed in his ear, as the tree creaked ominously above them.

"Not that it matters to me-" With a loud crack, the branch snapped off the trunk of the tree. The two dragons fell, their progress fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it) slowed by every single branch beneath them.

"\_Oof!\_" Toothless landed on his back in a flurry of leaves and branches, followed moments later by Lightning, who fell directly on top of him, one of her elbows going straight into his abdomen. "\_Gah!\_"

Gasping for air, he curled over on his side. "You're" \_cough\_ "gonna" \_cough\_ "pay" \_cough\_ cough\_.

"Sorry, love," Lightning said, sounding anything but sorry. Way up above them, Cinder and Ash were shrieking with laughter, and some of the humans had stopped their work to watch her and Toothless crash to the ground.

Finally, Toothless was able to suck in a full breath, and he turned to glare at his mate, who was sitting on her haunches, looking innocently off to one side. "You're lucky I have to get back to Hiccup," he growled.

"I guess I'll go get the kids out of the tree," she said quickly. "See ya later!" With that she darted over to the nearby tree and

quickly climbed it, hopping from branch to branch until she reached Ash and Cinder, who were still having trouble keeping straight faces.

"Hmmpf." Toothless walked a little bit into the clearing, ignoring the guffaws and stares of the humans, and leapt into the air, heading back toward the village.

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless rumbled his displeasure at Valka, who shushed him before continuing to arrange a crown of flowers around the top of his head.<p>

"Why am I doing this, again?" he muttered to Stormfly, who was crouched on the ground outside Hiccup and Valka's house while another woman positioned a floral circlet on her head.

"Because Hiccup and Astrid want us to be part of the ceremony, and Astrid wants us to look nice."

"\_You \_look nice. I look incredibly stupid."

"Oh hush. No you don't."

"I'm pretty sure I do," Toothless said flatly.

Valka finished placing the flowers between his ears and patted his cheek. "Wait 'til Astrid and Hiccup see how handsome you look!"

Aside from the flowers, Toothless felt he had done a respectable job of cleaning himself up. His black scales shone in the sunlight, reflecting the blue of the sky. Just then, Cloudjumper, Hookfang, Barf and Belch, and Meatlug flew up, the latter three bearing their humans, who jumped off their dragons and headed inside, chattering and laughing in their finest attire.

"Oh, Alpha Toothless, didn't see you there," said Hookfang. "I mistook you for Lightning."

"Ha ha, very funny," grumbled Toothless.

"You look very pretty," Cloudjumper said with a straight face, causing Barf and Belch to burst out laughing.

"So much for the offspring of lightning and Death itself! More like, offspring of rainbows and butterflies!" Hookfang was cracking himself up.

"No support, here?" Toothless called over to Meatlug, who was complimenting Stormfly's flower tiara.

"Um, you look very cute?" Meatlug offered.

"Thanks," he said, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, my." \_Wonderful\_. Turning around, Toothless reluctantly forced himself to look his mate in the eyes. Lightning was staring wide-eyed at him, or rather, the top of his head, while Cinder stood next to

her, jaw dropped. Ash, on the other hand, was beaming from where she sat on Lightning's shoulders.

"Go ahead, have at it. Hookfang's already gotten the ball rolling."

"Yeah," cackled Belch. "And Cloudjumper--"

"--thinks he looks very pretty!" finished Barf.

"What do you want from me?" asked the Stormcutter. "I'm just 'telling it like it is', as the younger dragons say."

Lightning barely suppressed a snort at that. Cloudjumper rarely joked around, though he did have a wide sarcastic streak. Allowing Ash to slide off her back, she walked over to where Toothless sat glowering, and started nuzzling his neck. "I think you look very handsome," she said sweetly.

"Yeah, and Hiccup has learned to fly without crashing into things," he retorted, though his scowl was fading.

"Maybe he has!" She rubbed her nose against his, eliciting an "Ewww!" from Cinder and a "Get a room!" from Hookfang.

"You're just jealous, Hookfang. Go suck on an eel, or whatever it is you do that has diminished your mental capacity to this extent," Lightning replied brightly.

"What's that supposed to mean?" asked the confused Nightmare.

"I believe she just called you stupid," clarified Toothless.

"Hey!"

"Does anyone here disagree with Lightning? No?" Toothless looked around at his friends, feigning shock.

"\_I \_don't think you're stupid." Ash piped up, hopping over to where Hookfang was sulking.

"That's because you're very wise, brilliant in fact, for your age," the Nightmare beamed at her.

"Oh come on, Ash; show a little loyalty," Toothless complained.

"It's not nice to call people stupid, Toothless," Ash said firmly.

"I agree with Ash," said Meatlug.

"I don't recall making this a vote."

"You're just sore because you have a rainbow fairy village on your head," sniffed Hookfang.

Toothless was about to tell him just where he was going to shove that "fairy village" when Hiccup walked out of the house.

Toothless did a double take. Instead of his usual leather suit, Hiccup had traded his armor for a white tunic embroidered with gold, and a dark blue cape around his shoulders. His pants were the same color as the cape, and his boots were black. One thing that remained unchanged was his messy auburn hair, tiny braids included.

Fiddling with the cuffs of his sleeves, it took Hiccup a moment to notice the dragons. "Toothless! What have they done to you, bud?"

Toothless groaned, and Hiccup hastily amended, "You look, um, really nice?"

The Night Fury groaned again, and Hiccup looked around at the other dragons, who all seemed to be snickering at his dragon's expense.

"Oh, you just wait," he told them. "Wait until \_your \_riders find spouses. You'll be part of the weddings too, and I doubt your humans will be as easygoing as Astrid about the whole 'flower' thing."

"Hiccup! Get back inside!" one of the women yelled. "Yer goin' to get filthy before the fun even starts!"

A group of men from the village approached, calling out to the women.

"All right, ladies," said Gobber, wearing a too-tight tunic that had seen better days and a very strange bow around his neck. "Time for the men to get to work."

"Aye," agreed Spitelout. "Hiccup needs to be told some things, and I sincerely doubt any of \_you \_will be wanting to tell them to him."

Hiccup paled at his uncle's words, but the women only began to cackle and collected their things without protest, only furthering his discomfort. The dragons watched this curiously. \_What could they possibly need to talk about?\_

After a grinning Ruffnut, Valka was the last to leave the house in her finest furs, stopping to place her hands on Hiccup's cheeks. "I am so proud of you, son. I know your father would tell you the same, if he were here. As it is, I believe he'll be watching from a seat of honor." With one last smile, she wished him "good luck", one eyebrow raised at the jolly looking men with what could only be described as evil smiles on their faces.

Waving cheerily, she followed the other women down the hill toward the Hofferson house.

"Um, soâ€¦ I've got some, uh, things I need to, uh-" Hiccup stuttered.

"Oh no ye don't, lad!" Gobber shouted gleefully. "Time to teach ye about the birds and the bees."

Hiccup looked more terrified than anyone, human or dragon, had ever

seen him. "\_Gobber,\_" he choked out. "I \_know \_about- about \_that.\_"

"Well, we can't have ye scarin' off yer wife before ye even-"

"Okay! Okay, let's just, ah, go inside and, um, \_talk." \_Hiccup smacked a hand against his face and waved the group of men into the house, gazing longingly at the dragons, who didn't seem like they discussed \_the birds and the bees.\_

Once the door shut behind the humans, Ash looked up curiously at Toothless. "What are the bees and the birds?"

Toothless coughed. "Uh, you knowâ€¦ how about you ask Lightning that in, say, twenty years? Okay, gotta go! Come on, Stormfly!" he called over to the Nadder, who was still chattering away with Meatlug. Not waiting, he took to the skies, one paw holding down the flowers on his head, heading back to the meadow.

Lightning would have burst out laughing if Ash hadn't immediately turned her keen gaze in her direction. Cinder piped up, "Why are they talking about \_that\_?" After a pause, he said suspiciously, "Are they not really talking about birds and bugs?"

\_Oh, boy. \_

### 35. Chapter 30 Pt 2

\*\*I'm thinking of maybe writing about the wedding in more detail from the Vikings' perspective, just to go more in depth. Probably won't be the most historically accurate piece of fiction ever written, but I'll do my best. Maybe I'll even take things up a notch rating-wise. Who knows? Anyways, enjoy this chapter, keep reviewing, and stay awesome!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>All of Berk was in attendance, human and dragon, not to mention the members of other tribes who had made the journey overseas to attend the ceremony. That is, the other tribes that had come to be somewhat less apprehensive about making peace with the dragons.<p>

Next to Hiccup, Toothless did his best to appear interested, and truly he was to an extent, but ultimately the complexities of human customs proved too much to comprehend at once. Hiccup and Astrid (who was wearing a \_dress!\_) stood under the flower-laced arch, as Gothi presided with Gobber translating as calmly and as officially as possible. The wedding was of special importance, given that it was the Chief of the Hooligan Tribe who was getting married, so everyone stayed remarkably quiet and respectful through the ceremony. Well, until the bride and groom kissed, when raucous cheering broke out among the younger generations of Vikings.

Grinning, Hiccup turned to stand side by side with Astrid and took her hand in his, squeezing it gently. He did his very best to block out the rather one-sided conversation with Gobber and the other men that had taken place only hours ago. His nerves could wait a while. All of the Vikings stood from their seats and cheered for their Chief

and his new wife, and the dragons behind them roared along with them, stomping their feet and shaking their wings.

Behind the couple, Toothless edged over to where Stormfly stood. "Can I take this thing off my head now?"

"Not yet," she whispered back. Hiccup and Astrid began to walk back down the aisle, and were quickly surrounded by the other humans.

He spied his mate making her way around the throng of Vikings and dragons slowly beginning to turn back to the village. Ash was perched on her neck and Cinder followed close behind them.

"Toothless!" Cinder called out, moving ahead of them.

Watching the younger male squeeze between humans to get to him, Toothless realized how much Cinder had grown since he had arrived on Berk. Now that he was ten years old, Toothless would bet that the young dragon was about to hit another growth spurt. He reminded himself to spend more time with Cinder, maybe help him with his target practice. Go flying. Things like that. It occurred to Toothless that Cinder no longer had any adult Night Furies besides himself and Lightning to look up to, and that neither he or his mate were particular founts of Night Fury knowledge, so it was especially important that he make the effort to set a good example for the young dragon.

"I think maybe you should take those flowers off your head now," Cinder finally reached him, looking serious. Quickly he added, "Not that you don't look just as scary with them, maybe even scarier, but maybe let a girl dragon have them. They're, uh, nice?"

Toothless laughed. "Scary, huh? I guess I better get rid of them."

Lightning and Ash arrived, so Toothless gently slid the crown off his head with one paw and placed it around Ash's neck. The young Night Fury looked absolutely delighted, and she said happily, "Oh, thank you! I love them!"

Now that it was on his mind, Ash had grown, too. Toothless figured that if Cinder was almost half his size now, Ash had to be half of her brother's size. Although she was small for her age, it wouldn't be long before she would be just a little too big to be carried around by Lightning.

"Shall we follow the masses?" Lightning asked.

"I suppose we should probably make an appearance," he said with a small smile. Letting the younger dragons run ahead after the crowd, Toothless whispered to his mate. "You know, I'm not so sure I'm going to want to be next door to Hiccup and Astrid tonightâ€¦ maybe we should have a sleepover," he grinned deviously. "I'm thinking the meadow will be quiteâ€¦ relaxing after such a long day."

Lightning snorted. "Something tells me that it won't be all that relaxing, but I can't say I'm not tempted. We'll see," she said airily as she walked past him, sliding her tail along his side, and Toothless looked after her longingly as she bounded after the younger dragons.



Oh yes. \_Relaxing.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The weeks flew by, carrying Berk into the brief autumn months before the long, harsh winter. Hiccup, true to his word, had begun "therapy" for Ash, which he had developed with his mother and Gobber. They would stretch out her wings and flex them in and out repeatedly until they were warmed up, then all together lift her up and drop her small distances to re-acclimate her body to the sensation of being airborne. At first, only Toothless, Lightning, and Cinder were present, but as time passed, more and more villagers and dragons began showing up to watch Ash's progress. After another month, Hiccup, Valka, and Gobber took her up to a windy cliff top and set her up in a harness of Hiccup's design, connected to a post hammered solidly into the ground. Toothless, Lightning, Cinder, and a group of Vikings and dragons who had decided to make the trek up after them all looked on as Hiccup explained what they were going to attempt.<p>

"Okay, Ash. Mom and I are going to lift you into the air, and I want you to spread your wings out all the way, alright? Gobber will be right behind you just in case the rope snaps or becomes untied. Which it won't," Hiccup said confidently.

Ash, a little hesitant, looked over where the other three Night Furies sat. They all gave her encouraging smiles, and so she turned back to Hiccup and nodded firmly. The human grinned and said, "All right! Let's do this!"

Valka and Hiccup crouched down at Ash's sides and lifted her wings up so they could hold onto her small belly. Gobber positioned himself a few feet behind them, and once he gave Hiccup a thumbs up, they lifted the young Night Fury up, ducking their heads so she could spread her wings. Once they were fully unfurled, the wind took over, and the harness gently pressed against her shoulders as the rope went taut.

"Tuck your legs in, Ash!" Hiccup told her, and she obliged, looking determined. "Good! keep it up, you're doing great!"

Ash realized that she no longer felt the humans' hands on her, and looked down. Hiccup and Valka were still next to her, but they had let go, their arms lowered. Panicking, she lost her concentration and dropped about a foot. They quickly caught her and gently raised her again until the rope was completely stretched out.

"Don't worry! Just keep your wings open, and the wind will do all the work! You can do it!" they shouted encouragements at her, and the small crowd behind them had started in, as well.

"Yeah, Ash!"

"Come on!"

"You got this, Ash!"

Swallowing her nervousness, Ash funneled all of her strength into her wings, feeling them stretched by the air in a way that wasn't

uncomfortable. Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes, and when she opened them and looked down, no one was holding her.

Instead, Hiccup and Valka had stepped back, grinning like maniacs. Cinder ran up beneath her and shouted, "You're doing it, Ash! You're doing it all by yourself!" Behind them, the small crowd cheered wildly, pleased and excited by her progress and by the ingenuity of the Chief.

A big toothless grin spread on her little face, and she yelled, "Toothless! Lightning! Do you see? Do you see me? I'm flying!"

"We see you! You're doing amazing!" they shouted back, exchanging thrilled glances. Toothless walked forward, coming up next to her. He was big enough that his head was level with her legs, and she smiled at him, the humming in her chest loud enough to be heard over the wind.

"All right, Ash. When you're ready to come down, move your wings like \_this,\_ " he demonstrated, turning to face her so that she could see better. The determined look returned to her face, and she gradually tilted her wings as Toothless directed until the strength of the air currents abated and she gently dropped to the ground, her legs instinctively extending to catch her.

Toothless couldn't contain his excitement, but no one else could, either. Ash bounded forward and pressed herself against his chest, murmuring "I did it, I did it, I did it!"

He wrapped a paw around her shoulders, holding her close, before stepping back. "You should thank Hiccup. He helped you do it, you know."

Animatedly she turned and darted toward Hiccup before leaping up to be held by him. Well, he tried to hold her, but she had grown to the point where only the burliest Vikings could carry her, and Hiccup was knocked off his feet. He laughed as she licked his face, moving to push her off, but not really trying to. Valka and Gobber were laughing as well, overjoyed that the little dragon had overcome impossible odds to get back into the air.

Over the next few weeks, as ice began forming on the streams and ponds of the island, and several inches of snow fell, Hiccup, Toothless, Lightning, and Cinder would take Ash up to the cliff top and harness her. She would stand on Toothless's back and spread her wings until the wind caught her and lifted her up. Slowly Hiccup brought longer lengths of rope, and before long she was gliding fifteen, twenty feet in the air.

The time came, when snow blanketed the ground and rooftops, for her to fly without the harness. When the sun was shining and the wind wasn't quite tearing through the trees and the Chief and the Alpha had time to spare, they would carry Ash up over the ocean. Hiccup would ride a completely willing Lightning with a small, barely noticeable black saddle- just so he had something to hold onto as he joined the Night Furies on their flights. Ash would climb up Toothless's back and spread her wings wide until she hovered just above his shoulders, and Toothless would gently weave in and out of the currents, having Ash mirror his movements above him. Cinder liked to fly off to their left and Hiccup and Lightning would take up

position on their right side, and together they would fly in formation high up above the rippling sea. If she got nervous or tired, she could simply drop back down onto Toothless's back and they would all turn back to the village.

It was after one of these flights that the five of them landed by the shelter, Hiccup chatting to the dragons about the upcoming Snoggletog festivities that were about a month away. Toothless already knew about Snoggletog, but his mate and the two younger dragons had never heard of such a holiday, or even the concept of holidays in general, and they paid rapt attention as Hiccup explained Berk's traditions and how things had changed since the dragons had come to be a part of the humans' celebrations.

As Hiccup slid off of Lightning's shoulders, pushing up his flight mask and unbuckling the light saddle from her back, Astrid and Valka stepped out of the house. Hiccup had finished the outside of his and Astrid's home right before the wedding, and the two of them were still working on the inside, with help from Valka. It was a large structure, designed to make room for four-legged visitors. Namely, one particular black-scaled visitor, his mate, and his two young charges, but Hiccup had also come up with the idea for window shutters that took up the whole wall. While they had to remain closed in the winter, when summer came back around Hiccup hoped that they would be able to keep them open during the day so that the larger dragons could come up to the house and participate in whatever gathering might be going on.

Stormfly lived on the opposite side of the house in a spacious open-walled structure, not unlike the one she lived in at the Hofferson house. Now, she came out, gulping down a fish, and came over to join them, asking how their flight went. Once Hiccup released her, Lightning answered, briefly telling the blue Nadder about what they had accomplished before asking how her day had gone. Cinder and Ash immediately headed down to the feeding station to see some of the younger dragons, who they had become fast friends with because of their open and friendly natures. The other young dragons were also slightly awed by Cinder's explosive powers, which many of them tried to duplicate, only instead of blowing up targets, they often ended up lighting houses on fire, and occasionally the stray Viking or tree.

Toothless promised to join them soon as they ran off, then turned to watch as Hiccup went up to greet Astrid. The Chief had gotten into the habit of kissing his wife often, no matter who was present, in public and in private. What could he say? He was deeply in love, and he didn't care what anybody else thought. Fortunately, everybody else was quite amused by their obvious affection, and beyond some good-natured teasing, no one objected.

So, he pulled Astrid close and kissed her soundly, despite the fact that his mother was standing right there. But Valka was simply looking out at the horizon, where the red-orange rays of the setting sun peeked through an expanse of puffy gray clouds.

\_She was so beautiful. In fact, she only seemed to become more radiant with each passing day. \_Hiccup could get lost in her blue eyes, and was in the process of doing so when she pulled him out of his reverie.

"Hiccup?"

"Mmmâ€¦ yes?"

"There's something I need to tell you." Her voice was serious, but her eyes sparkled with some unrestrained joy.

"What's up?" he tucked the saddle under his arm and took her hand in his, walking back up to the house.

Valka walked down to where Toothless stood and rubbed him under his chin. "This has been a year of change, hasn't it, Toothless?"

He could only rumble his agreement, and together they watched what they could see of the sunset while Lightning chatted with Stormfly. Behind them, Hiccup and Astrid had stopped at the steps to their door, and they were now facing each other, holding both of each other's hands. Their voices carried a bit, and something about Astrid's tone made Toothless turn around, just in time to see Hiccup completely drop the saddle and fall to his knees.

"Really?" he whispered.

"Yes," tears pricked Astrid's eyes, but she doubted she had ever smiled wider in her life, not even when Hiccup had asked her to marry him.

Hiccup's mouth opened in a silent "O" before he leapt back up to his feet, wrapped his arms around his wife and spun her around. They were both laughing and crying just a little bit, and down the hill, Toothless's jaw had dropped, and Valka stood next to him, unable to hold in her laughter.

Stormfly had told Lightning almost immediately, so she wasn't as surprised as Toothless, but seeing how happy Astrid and Hiccup were pushed her mind into overdrive. \_If it was time for them, maybe it's time for us, too.\_

But life rarely works in the ways we expect, and Lightning knew that better than most. So she decided once again to keep her mouth shut, and let things play out as they would. After all, all of Berk was her family now. What more could she ask for?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Just a few more chaptersâ€¦ As far as the sequel goes, I'll definitely post a notice up here when I start posting it so anyone interested can follow it :)<strong>

## 36. Chapter 31

\*\*I can certainly dig that I have readers in 57 countries. Always cool! Just like you guys :)\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Another three weeks passed. After a week of frost and two weeks of solid snow, the sun had made an appearance, so humans had begun their Snoggletog preparations. To avoid being put to work, Stormfly,

Meatlug, and Lightning had quietly slipped out of the village that morning.<p>

They had spent the day flying over the island, and now were fishing leisurely at an unfrozen section of a river not far from the village. The three females chatted and laughed, discussing the upcoming Snoggletog festivities. Lightning told them about Cinder and Ash, who, along with many of the other young dragons, enjoyed joining the humans in their holiday tasks, decorating high up places and generally relieving most of the adult dragons of their work.

The sun was now setting, and as the shadows of the surrounding trees lengthened on the snowy ground, an unfamiliar scent wafted in on the rising winds.

"Another storm is coming in," commented Stormfly, eyeing the dark clouds approaching from the east.

"We'd better get back, then," said Lightning, and Meatlug nodded her agreement.

Distracted by the news she had to deliver to Toothless, she didn't notice the sudden silence of the forest.

It had just happened this morning. \_It \_is \_a little premature, \_she thought with growing excitement, \_ but hopefully he won't mind, I sure don't, maybe he'll even--

"Lightning."

"What?" she replied, before finally sensing the unusual hush in the atmosphere. She raised her nose in the air and took a deep breath, sniffing the air. \_Something is wrong.\_ The sun slipped below the tree line, leaving the air cold and dark. "We need to leave. Now."

Dark shadows began appearing, crawling out from behind boulders and leaping from trees. Icy dread crept into her chest, and Lightning backed towards a petrified Stormfly and Meatlug.

"Fly," she said. "Fly," she repeated. "NOW!"

The Nadder and Gronckle took off, and Lightning leapt into the air after them, but it was too late.

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless had been watching Hiccup repair the roof of his house in the setting sun. Earlier in the day, an overeager and out of control Academy student and his Gronckle had crashed through the ceiling of Hiccup and Astrid's bedroom, creating quite the mess. Fortunately, the couple had been downstairs, and now that it was all cleaned up the Chief worked on replacing the smashed tiles.<p>

He hadn't been back in the shelter since he had left it before the sun had risen, not bothering to go back inside since Lightning had gone off with Stormfly and Meatlug for the day. Eret, Son of Eret had returned from his long trading voyage with Skullcrusher that morning, and Toothless hoped to catch up with the Rumblehorn soon.

Cinder was on the ground with Ash, playfully wrestling with his sister around Astrid, who sat on the hillside next to the house with them. It was a gentle tussle, all of them careful to avoid the gentle swell of Astrid's growing pregnancy. They were giggling, little rumbles, and Astrid laughed delightedly with them as they tugged at her furs and licked her face. "You guys! That doesn't wash out!"

Absently, Toothless wondered for a moment what his mate and friends were doing. The sun was nearing the horizon, and they still hadn't returned. He was hoping they wouldn't be too much longer, as the migration to the nesting island was in less than a week, and he wanted to get a few good nights of sleep beforehand.

As the Alpha, he felt obligated to join the other dragons as they journeyed to lay their eggs. For protection, for support, whatever-it wasn't necessarily a requirement, it was just something a good leader did.

Lightning hadn't said anything about eggs, so he assumed with a mixture of and relief and disappointment that there wouldn't be any baby Night Furies this Snoggletog. \_Maybe next yearâ€¦ \_

His reverie was disturbed by the sound of approaching wings. For a moment it barely registered, after all, they lived on an island full of dragons, but then-

"TOOTHLESS!" It was a scream, of sheer terror.

Hiccup heard the shrieking of a dragon and turned quickly to see Stormfly barreling towards him. "Whoa!" he ducked as the blue dragon passed over him, landing heavily on the roof. He crossed his fingers and sent a quick prayer to the gods that the new tiles would hold under the Nadder's weight.

Stormfly was screeching and flapping her wings, seemingly shouting at Toothless in a language Hiccup wished desperately he could understand. \_Was thatâ€¦ blood on her scales? \_Suddenly his dragon's jaw dropped and his eyes went wide.

"Bud, what is it?!" Hiccup called, but the Night Fury had already leapt off the roof and sprinted to his shelter, almost knocking the door off its hinges.

For a moment, it was silent. Hiccup slid down the roof shingles, holding on with a hand as he smoothly swung himself down to the ground. He took one concerned step in his dragon's direction, passing Astrid as she got to her feet. Then the air seemed to shatter around him.

From within the shelter could be heard a keening wail, a roar of such despair it sent chills down every spine in the village. Toothless burst from the door, pupils slits, with a terrifying expression on his normally amiable face. Without pause he leapt into the air, flapping his wings once, twice, before bringing them down hard, creating a sonic boom as he exploded away from Berk.

Another roar could be heard from a nearby rooftop. It was Cinder, somehow he had managed to fly over there without being noticed, and he seemed to beâ€¦ summoning the other dragons. He called out to

them, again and again, until a cloud of them had gathered before him.

"Is that Stormfly?" Astrid gasped, pointing. Her dragon had left the roof of their house and was in the air, hovering near Cinder as he called to the others.

"Yes and Hookfang, and Barf and Belch!" Hiccup exclaimed. "What are they?" he trailed off as Cinder leapt from the roof and took off after Toothless. The flock of dragons wheeled and followed him, roaring and screeching as they flew.

Hiccup and Astrid watched the dragons fly off, before turning to look at each other, speechless. "It must have something to do with..." Suddenly, Hiccup turned and ran to the shelter, flinging open the door. Astrid followed, stepping into the dark room. "Hiccup?"

Hiccup didn't speak. He stood there, frozen, and Astrid peered around him.

"Oh, Toothless!" Astrid choked, and she buried her head in Hiccup's shoulder.

Before them, nestled in the blankets and straw at the back of the shelter, was a single, perfect, black egg.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Here's what's up. (Don't worry, this isn't the last chapter!) I've actually got this story finished, but I'm going to spread out the last few chapters to give you all something to read while I start work on the sequel. How about one every weekend? I know that's a long time for me, so I hope you all can be patient.</strong></p>

\*\*Even after this is over, I'd still love to hear what you've all thought of this whole thing. Reviews and suggestions are always welcome, so, you know, do that.\*\*

\*\*\*\*PPS! If you guys want me to update more than once a week, seeing as how I've got lots to share with you, just let me know. Seriously, if enough people review, I can be convinced to do all kinds of stuff. Mostly update, though. \*\*\*\*

\*\*Cheers!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: \*\*

\*\*Okay so I guess there's some confusion regarding the egg. Lightning references that it "happened that morning" and Toothless mentions that he left the shelter before Lightning did that morning and hadn't bothered going back in. So the egg business happened then. I imagine that Lightning probably wouldn't want to leave her new egg, but she also probably didn't want to tell anyone about it yet, and so couldn't say no when Stormfly and Meatlug wanted to leave the village for the day. Does that help? :)\*\*

## 37. Chapter 32

\*\*Well, I had some free time todayâ€¦ and I couldn't resist.  
\*\*

\*\*"You know," the author said conversationally, "I'd probably update even more quickly if there were more reviews." \*\*

\*\*(Tempting fate here, but it was worth a shot haha)\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Cinder roared as loudly as he could to catch Toothless's attention. He couldn't let him face Brann and his minions alone.<p>

Behind him, led by Stormfly, was a flock of extremely determined and energized dragons. Each of them was filled with rage at the one responsible for causing their Alpha so much distress, not to mention the fact that it was Brann responsible for the devastation of the Serpent's attack earlier in the year, and Cinder's "distraction" before that. That evil Night Fury had crossed too many lines, so when Cinder had summoned them, they willingly followed.

Those who flew with him were the fastest dragons on Berk, either males or unmated females, who were not expecting eggs soon. There was no telling how long this journey would take. The dragons knew that the expecting females would and could make the journey to the nesting island on their own, if need be. Fortunately, they would be accompanied by the older, more experienced dragons and the Vikings who each year followed the migration with several ships to bring back the new hatchlings.

Finally Toothless turned, beating his wings to hold himself aloft, seemingly surprised to see so many dragons in the distance behind him. Cinder was able to catch up, and breathlessly he told Toothless that there was no way he was going to let him go to the colony to face Brann alone.

Toothless didn't want to wait for them all to catch up. He wanted to find Lightning as quickly as he could. But Cinder was right, he couldn't hope to take on Brann's little army by himself. He nodded grimly to Cinder, and once the flock was closer, he and the smaller Night Fury turned back to their course.

\_Hold on, Lightning. Hold on.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The Serpents roughly threw her to the ground at the top of the canyon, overlooking the sea. It would have been a beautiful sight, the sun reflecting off the deep blue waters, if not for the snarling dragons around her.<p>

They had rendered her unconscious with a powerful blow to the back of her skull, and every time she woke up and began struggling, they would knock her out again. When she finally came to the last time, she was too weak to move much, and they let her stay awake, hissing evil and terrifying things at her. The only thing keeping her from breaking down was the certainty that Toothless would come for her and



take her home, home to their egg.

So, even though the Serpents' treatment had left her dizzy and nauseous, she wouldn't allow their presence to ruin the view for her.

\_She had always loved this part of the island best. She and Shade would come sit up here and discuss life, as they had done since they were young. So she loved the ocean, for it reminded her of her brother. \_

For at some point, one of those blows to her head had unlocked the part of her mind that had been hidden from her, and her memories had come flooding back. She remembered her childhood. Remembered her parents. Remembered Shade and Stella, who had been just like an older sister to her. Remembered their senseless deaths, and Brann's subsequent capture of her, intending to make her his mate and use her to control the other dragons. Remembered being brutally beaten, remembered her escape that night, remembered fighting her way past the Serpents guarding her cave, sustaining further injury, remembered flying blindly through the storm, desperate to get as far away from that island and Brann as possible. Remembered the flash of light, then- nothing.

All her memories, vivid and tangible, beautiful and terrible. Then Toothless. All of her life with Toothless was present and spiraling through her head, keeping her sane.

"Well, well, well. What do we have here?" A familiar voice said snidely.

Lightning forced herself to look at Flame. "You\_ bastard\_," she hissed. "Toothless will come for me, and when he does, you're going to be sorry."

"No," he snapped. "\_You're \_going to be sorry!" He turned his head and where his right eye should be there was only a terrible scar. She resisted the urge to smile darkly. "I would gladly make you suffer as I have, but I believe Brann has far more exciting things in store for you."

She heard wings flapping and a loud \_thump. \_"Oh yes," a rough voice said coldly. "I believe I do."

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup knew that Lightning was in dire straits if so many dragons had followed Toothless to go after her. Running down to the docks, he spied Eret, Son of Eret unloading his ship along with several other Vikings.<p>

"Hiccup!" he called out. "Did you see all those dragons flying off? Where are they going?"

"Hi, Eret," Hiccup said a little breathlessly, skidding to a stop on the icy planks of the dock. "I need your help."

"What can I do for you?"

"I know you oversaw the construction of those new shipsâ€¦ How fast

are they?"

"The very fastest, even without help."

"How would you and Skullcrusher feel about going out again?"

Eret looked at Hiccup, seeing the desperation in the Chief's eyes.  
"I'd be happy to."

"I'll get the dragons, can you get the crew?"

"Consider it done."

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning wanted to close her eyes and shut him out, but instead she slowly lifted herself onto her feet, swaying slightly as she glared at Brann. His eyes had always been disturbing, but now they were dramatically bloodshot, to the point where from a distance they simply appeared red.<p>

"Ugh," Brann spat. "What has happened to your hide? You're hideous, you've been maimed! Of course only a cripple would take you for a mate!" he laughed, a harsh, maniacal sound.

"Oh yes," he continued, seeing the rage in her eyes. "I've heard about your \_mate\_, the \_Alpha.\_ I think once I've finished with you, I'll take care of him as well, and then \_I \_will be the Alpha, and all of your little friends back on Berk will bow to \_me.\_"

"Disgusting, dragons allowing humans to \_ride \_them, to call them \_theirs. \_And now you're one of them! And look how weak you are. You barely put up a fight. You're not fit to be in my presence, you aren't fit to call yourself a Night Fury. You aren't fit to live." With that final declaration, he stepped back and wordlessly gestured at her with his head, signaling the Serpents to attack.

\* \* \*

><p>The island came into sight, and all of the dragons renewed their efforts, flying hard to keep up with their Alpha, who had raced ahead of them once again.<p>

"Cinder!" Toothless called out to the young Night Fury. "Go to the caves with the others and gather the Night Furies. I'll find Lightning."

"But what about-"

"Just go!"

\* \* \*

><p>Lightning did her best. She fired plasma blasts until she ran out of shots. She kicked and clawed and bit, but there were just too many of them. After she fell, they continued to rain blows upon her, until Brann stopped them.<p>

"That's enough." Hissing, the Serpents backed away, frustrated at

having their fun interrupted.

"Leave us," he motioned to them, and walked over to a bleeding, battered Lightning, breathing heavily on the ground.

When he was within reach, she suddenly lashed out with one paw, catching him in the face with her claws and barely missing his eye.

Brann snarled and kicked her, then gave a humorless laugh. "You'd like to maim me as you did Flame. Well, I'm not planning on giving you the opportunity. I hope you've enjoyed your time here, because it's all the time you had left."

\* \* \*

><p>Spying two black shapes at the upper edge of the canyon, Toothless dove, landing roughly and sprinting forward before stopping completely, as icy fear froze him in his tracks.<p>

He saw Lightning on the ground, blood streaming from fresh wounds all over her body. Brann stood above her, about to deliver what would surely be a mortal blow. His eyes widened, and something snapped inside of him. In the place of Toothless was an Alpha, the Alpha who had defeated the Bewilderbeast in defense of the human he loved. Once again, someone he loved was threatened, once again, it was up to him to make it right.

\* \* \*

><p>Brann's face stung, blood dripping from the slash marks Lightning had delivered with her claws. He slowly raised himself up, about to deliver the killing blow to his broken, defeated prey. She stared up at him, hate in her eyes, and he grinned maniacally. Just as he was about to drive his sharp claws through her throat, a terrible sound erupted from across the stretch of flat rock they were on.<p>

Toothless snarled, enraged. Brann looked up, caught off guard by his arrival, and the number of colorful dragons following him.

The evil Night Fury regained his composure quickly and spoke up, his voice dripping with disdain. "You must be the cripple. \_Toothless.\_"

"How \_dare \_you speak to him that way!" someone hissed behind him, but Toothless wasn't paying much attention. \_Cripple? \_Toothless had never thought about himself that way. As far as he was concerned, if his missing tailfin didn't bother Lightning or Hiccup, it wouldn't bother him. Rather than undermine his confidence, it only made him more certain that he would enjoy destroying this twisted Night Fury as painfully as possible.

Brann continued. "Well, I hope you've had fun with little Skygge here, because the game is over for the both of you." He gestured over their shoulders, and looking back, they could see a number of Serpents approaching.

Distracted, Brann didn't notice Lightning raising her neck to clamp her jaws around his left foreleg. With a shriek of pain, he tried to

free himself, to no avail. With a frustrated hiss he swiped down hard with his other foreleg, striking it against the side of her skull. Her head snapped back, leaving great bloody tears in his leg where her teeth had been, but she hit the ground hard, and didn't move again. Looking down, Brann saw bone through his shredded flesh, and his already questionable sanity took another blow. \_I will destroy her. But first\_ and he turned his crazed gaze upon Toothless and the dragons gathered behind him. The red-eyed Night Fury leapt over Lightning, left foreleg tucked up close to his body, and made his way closer to the dragons. "It must be nice to be the \_Alpha.\_ I think I'd like to try it out," he said, opening his mouth to fire.

All rationality fled from Toothless's mind as he numbly stared at Lightning's still form. \_No\_ NO! \_

Gone was his sense of preservation, his sense of reason, his sense of mercy. In his rage, Toothless's spine began to glow blue with power, and Brann, noticing this, took a limping step back. "What- what are you doing?" Something akin to fear flashed in his eyes as Toothless began inhaling, blue light emanating from his mouth and nose. His pupils were barely visible slits, he was beyond reason now.

"You challenged the Alpha, now feel his wrath!" a voice screamed.

Brann didn't have time to look for the source of the voice, barely leaping out of the way in time as supercharged plasma exploded where he had been standing. The strength of the blast knocked him out of the air and he hit the ground hard, skidding to a stop. Unsteadily, the crazed Night Fury got to his feet, fear filling his heart. \_This was not like fighting Shade\_ \_Desperately he fired at Toothless, before taking to the air, holding his destroyed foreleg to his chest. Toothless allowed the weak shot to hit him in the shoulder. He didn't even feel it.

"Go, Toothless! We'll take care of Lightning!"

He barely heard Stormfly as he crouched down, spreading his wings and taking off. Brann was moving quickly, his speed carrying him across the canyon and far out over the ocean.

Behind him, the Serpents had closed in, their numbers greater than those of Berk's dragons. Gathering around Lightning's prone form, the dragons prepared to fend them off, to fight to the death if need be. \_Anything for the Alpha. \_

The first hissing Serpent leapt into the air towards Stormfly, and she crouched down, ready to meet it, when without warning a purple light flashed over her and exploded into it, killing it instantly. Blinking at the smoke and light, she turned to see Cinder coming over the edge of the canyon, followed by the rest of Berk's dragons and a tide of angry Night Furies, who with shrieks of rage jumped into the ranks of Serpents, slashing and savaging any within reach. Energized, the dragons of Berk joined them.

It was a slaughter, over in less than a minute. The remaining Serpents tried to flee, but the oppressed Night Furies showed them no mercy, taking out every last one of the snake-like dragons. But it was far from over. Gravely, the Night Furies and the dragons of Berk turned just in time to see Toothless catch up to Brann.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Guess who started a sequel!<strong>

\*\*Guess who has six chapters of it finished!\*\*

\*\*Guess who still has yet to finish posting this story!\*\*

\*\*Guess who kind of likes torturing her readers!\*\*

\*\*If you guessed me, you are correct. How did you figure it out?\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>PS: I love you guys haha, thank you to all of my wonderful reviewers.<strong>

### 38. Chapter 33

\*\*I was going to wait until tomorrow to post, but I thought I should clarify. There are a couple more chapters of this story that I have yet to put up. So don't worry! I wouldn't leave you hanging like that. Well, I \_have \_left you hanging, but I wouldn't make you wait for an entirely new story to be posted in order to see the conclusion.\*\*

\*\*Let me repeat. There are more chapters. Of the Night is not over yet. :)\*\*

\*\*Anyways. Back to the storyâ€| \*\*

\*\*"Gravely, the Night Furies and the dragons of Berk turned just in time to see Toothless catch up to Brannâ€|"\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Toothless, his body still glowing, shot a powerful blast just past Brann, forcing the wounded Night Fury to quickly come to a stop.<p>

He could see the desperation in the crazed dragon's eyes, but he was too furious to care.

"Don't think that just because I'm injured you'll be able to beat me!" Brann called, his voice breaking and betraying his fear.

"I will tear you limb from limb if I so choose," Toothless said, radiating with power.

"No!" With that, Brann launched himself at Toothless, who nimbly ducked out of the way. But this left him below Brann, who immediately dove down and began to grapple with him, causing them both to fall as they struggled. Brann slashed his good leg across Toothless's chest, leaving deep claw marks. In return, Toothless sank his teeth into the side of Brann's neck, causing him to shriek in pain. Their back legs clawed at each other, kicking and scratching even as their front legs pawed at each other's shoulders. Their wings flapped wildly to hold them aloft, but they were losing altitude.

Toothless was quickly growing bored with their fight. He was slightly tired from his journey but whatever power caused him to glow also alleviated his exhaustion and strengthened his body. Brann's injury was beginning to take its toll, and his reactions were slowing. Finally Toothless raised a paw and brought it down hard against Brann's shredded foreleg.

The maniacal Night Fury screamed in pain, and Toothless repeated the action, harder, thinking only of the devastation and pain this dragon had brought upon those he loved. Brann tried to disengage and fly away, but Toothless refused to let him go.

With the authority of an Alpha, he intoned, "\_Submit.\_"

"Never!" Brann gasped, his features twisted with pain.

Toothless slashed his claws across Brann's leg again, and once again the evil dragon cried out in pain.

"\_Submit!" \_He stared into Brann's eyes. Brann's pupils, already slits, narrowed further as his mind responded unwillingly to the Alpha's command. \_No, this was not like fighting Shadeâ€| this dragon was beyond his power, beyond the power of them all. \_But still he fought, weakly biting at Toothless's shoulder.

"\_SUBMIT!" \_And finally, Brann lost. His body went limp and Toothless let him fall, still focusing his mind on forcing the other Night Fury to remain completely motionless.

He charged up a plasma blast, as powerful as the one he had created to break off the Bewilderbeast's tusk, feeling no mercy or compassion. Firing, he watched in almost slow motion as the shot flew straight down at Brann and collided with his body, the strength of it breaking his bones and lighting his hide on fire.

Brann's body fell to the ocean, leaving behind a trail of flames and blood. It finally hit the surface and sank, deeper and deeper, until Toothless could no longer see it. Toothless waited, for one minute, two minutesâ€| until it was clear that Brann was gone for good.

\* \* \*

><p>Back at the canyon, every dragon watched in complete silence as Brann's body fell and sank beneath the waves. Slowly, all the Night Furies looked at each other, then began cheering wildly. The dragons of Berk, who weren't aware of the whole story, were also happy nonetheless. Their Alpha had won yet another battle, which didn't surprise them, but it was a relief to see him flying back towards their position.<p>

As he came closer, a voice yelled, "Give him some space!"

All of the dragons quieted and backed up, forming a wide circle around Stormfly and Cinder, who were crouched next to Lightning. Toothless landed, the glow in his back fading as blood dripped down from the wounds in his chest.

"Toothless! Cinder ran over to him. "You're hurt!"

"Nothing serious. Lightning, is sheâ€|?"

"She's breathing, but she closed her eyes a while ago and hasn't opened them since."

Toothless quickly bounded over to his mate, beginning to feel pain and weariness again. Stormfly backed away to stand by Cinder,

Crouching down, Toothless murmured to her, gently brushing the side of her face with his. "Love, you need to hold on," he said desperately. "For me. I can't keep going without you, Lightning. Hold on. If not for me, think of the eggâ€|" he swallowed, the reality crashing over him. \_He was going to be a father. \_"Our egg, Lightning, back home on Berk. I can't do it without you. I wouldn't even know where to start," he choked out a shaky laugh.

Her eyelids flickered, and she began to mumble. "I supposeâ€| I shouldn't subjectâ€| an innocent hatchlingâ€| to yourâ€| complete and utterâ€| incompetence."

For a moment, Toothless was speechless. Then he laughed, a sound of relief and disbelief. "Always so kind to me. Are you going to make it?" he asked her, peering at her battered face, desperately wishing he could kill Brann a thousand times more.

"No, she's not." Rage coursed through Toothless at the sound of Flame's voice. The Night Furies turned and began hissing at the yellow-eyed dragon, backing him towards the edge of the canyon. Just as it seemed he would be pushed off, he leapt over them, and with another leap extended his claws and opened his mouth wide to fire as he fell towards Toothless and Lightning.

Toothless crouched down to meet his attack when a bright light flashed across his vision and crashed into Flame, sending him tumbling backwards. The force of the blast knocked Toothless off his feet, and he covered Lightning with his wing as he looked over to see Cinder, mouth smoking, a deep scowl on his face.

Flame hit the ground hard, but slowly got to his feet, blood trickling from his mouth. "Youâ€|" he gasped, but Cinder cut him off, addressing the Night Furies.

"Get him." In an instant they fell upon Flame, wishing to inflict on him the pain they had suffered in for so long. He could never pay enough, though, so they carried his dying body to the edge of the cliff and threw him off to crash against the sharp rocks below.

Slightly shocked, Toothless lifted his wing and brought his face back next to his mate's. "Cinder just took out Flame," he said slowly.

"Like I said," she wheezed. "You can't evenâ€| take care of yourself."

Toothless laughed, thanking the human gods that his mate was still alive.

"Toothlessâ€|"

"Yes, love?"

"I remember."

For a few seconds he was confused, then: "You \_remember?  
\_Everything?"

"All of it."

"How? Wait, never mind. You can tell me all about it when you're feeling better. For now, rest."

\* \* \*

><p>The colony quickly got to work organizing themselves and accounting for one another, as many had not seen each other for long periods of time. There was much joy and relief, but also much sadness at the damage Brann had caused, and the deaths he was responsible for. As the sun set that day, they brought out all of the bodies from Brann's cave and created a pyre for each of them. The dragons of Berk joined them in their grief, feeling the loss of each innocent dragon that had been a victim of Brann's cruelty.<p>

"Stormfly, take the others back to Berk."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I'm staying here until Lightning is well enough to make the flight back."

"That could be a while."

"I don't care if it takes years," Toothless said quietly.  
"Cloudjumper will take my place."

"I'm staying, too," Cinder came up, looking earnest.

"You can't, Cinder," said Toothless. "You have to go back to Ash."

The young Night Fury looked torn, but he shook his head. "She'll understand. It's not like we're going to stay here, right?"

"I suppose so. Alright, Stormfly. Make sureâ€|" Toothless broke off, gathering himself, before continuing. "Make sure Hiccup knows we are okay, and make sureâ€| that he takes care of our egg."

The blue dragon nodded seriously, before taking off, followed by the colorful flock of dragons from Berk. The Night Furies gathered outside to watch them go, saddened that their new friends had to leave so soon.

Holly, the forest green-eyed Night Fury that Toothless had met when he had last been on the island, came and stayed with him, Lightning, and Cinder. It turned out that she was barely fourteen, and that she and Cinder had been close friends before Brann took over. Now, they made up for lost time, sharing what had happened in their lives since Cinder went to Berk. Holly also introduced her forest-eyed family, who Toothless had met so long ago: her older sister Ignis and their



oldest brother Talon, along with her two younger brothers, twins Palo and Svar.

Talon was almost Toothless's age, though not as large, and was chosen by the rest of the Furies to replace Brann as leader, once it became clear that Toothless intended to return to Berk and resume his leadership there. The twins were a bit younger than Cinder, and they enjoyed playing together, although Cinder later told Toothless that he got a strange feeling from Svar.

Lightning was too hurt to be moved into one of the caves, so they all slept outside. Fortunately, the weather was more mild than it was on Berk, and no storms came in to release snow upon them.

\* \* \*

><p>Two days later, Stormfly returned, squawking excitedly.  
"Toothless! Toothless!"<p>

"What is it?" he stood from where he had been lying next to Lightning, wondering why the blue Nadder had turned back.

She landed heavily, immediately shouting, "Hiccup is on his way! He's got a ship pulled by dragons, and they're probably going to be here tomorrow!"

"Are you serious?"

She was. By midmorning the next day, the Viking ship was spotted on the horizon, and it only took a couple of hours for the dragon propelled craft to arrive on the shores of the island. Lightning was drifting in and out of consciousness, but seemed to be stable enough.

The Night Furies, all of them just as curious as Toothless, watched from their caves as the humans lowered their anchors, shouting instructions and orders to each other. Stormfly flew out to the ship, and Hiccup leapt onto her back, gently pulling Astrid up behind him, and they flew back through the canyon, where Toothless eagerly waited above.

"Howâ€|?" Toothless asked as Hiccup jumped off of Stormfly's back, quickly helping Astrid down before running straight for his dragon. The human seemed to understand his dragon's question.

"This is where you went to get Ash? A Night Fury island?" he laughed incredulously. "When you and all the other dragons took off, I felt like you might need some backup. So we convinced a bunch of dragons to help pull that new ship, you know, the one with all the metal hoops on the bow, and Skullcrusher led us right to you. And when we saw Stormfly and the others," he gestured back to the Nadder, "we knew we were close."

Kneeling down, he gently stroked the top of Lightning's head. She purred weakly, opening her eyes to look at her mate's rider. "I'm glad we got here," Hiccup whispered. Looking up at his dragon, he placed a hand on Toothless's nose. "Not quickly enough though," he said, looking at the deep gashes in his dragon's chest and glancing over Lightning's battered body.

"A whole \_island \_o' Night Furies! That's a whole island of trouble, if ye ask me!" Gobber's voice carried from Grump's back as he flew up to land beside Stormfly. The blacksmith carried his "goody bag" and hobbled over to where Hiccup kneeled next to Lightning and Toothless. "All right, let's see wha' we have here!"

A little while later, he, Hiccup, and Astrid stood back, admiring their handiwork. Incredibly enough, Lightning's wings weren't broken, but she did have several broken ribs. "Dragons are a sturdy lot, yes indeed," Gobber said cheerfully. Flying back and forth, Hiccup organized a team to move Lightning onto the ship, lifting her with nets carried by a few Raincutters.

Fishlegs and Meatlug had come along for the ride, and now the husky Viking was darting around excitedly, scribbling down notes and exclaiming at the number of Night Furies that had gradually made their way out of their caves once they had decided the humans weren't a threat. Hearing a brief rundown of who he was from Cinder and Toothless, many of them approached Hiccup, sniffing him and receiving delightful scratches and rubs in return. He took out the last bit of dragon nip in his pocket and spread it out as long as possible, which was quite a pleasant surprise for the Furies, who had never encountered the plant before. All in all, it was quite an eventful day, leaving most everyone involved feeling optimistic and prepared for whatever might come in the future.

\* \* \*

><p>It was late afternoon by the time the ship and its passengers were ready.<p>

"Fishlegs, if you're not on this ship in the next five minutes, we're leaving without you!" Hiccup called out to his friend, who was still interacting avidly with a group of younger Night Furies, who seemed just as enchanted by his presence as he was by theirs.

Toothless spoke to many of the Night Furies, who were beyond grateful for his actions. They all seemed to want to talk to him, to get his attention. Finally, when the last of them drifted off, Talon approached him.

The new leader seemed comfortable in his role, although Toothless could detect his hesitation. "Thank you, Toothless. Without you, we likely would have spent a lifetime under Brann's rule."

"Well, I made a promise," Toothless replied, looking over to where Holly was talking earnestly to Cinder.

"Will you ever return?"

"I imagine you'll be hearing a fair bit from us, seeing how those two are enjoying each others' company," he gestured back to Talon's little sister, who wasn't all that much larger than Cinder now, although four years separated them.

Talon laughed. "It could be worse, I suppose. We'll see what happens when they're older."

"We will indeed."

The two leaders agreed without speaking that should either of them ever be in need, the other would be ready and willing to assist him.

"Take care of these dragons," Toothless said, not knowing how else to say goodbye.

"I'll do my best," Talon replied. "My life belongs to them now, I guess."

"That's right. You protect them all, with everything you have." Toothless was relieved that Talon understood that critical aspect of leadership. With a nod, he bid the smaller male goodbye. "Come on, Cinder," he called. He took off, gliding over to the largest ship, where Lightning lay on the deck, injured but mostly alert.

Cinder looked at Holly. "I guess this is it."

"Yeah," she said quietly. For a moment they just stood there.

"I'll come to Berk one of these days," she continued. "So I can see for myself if all of your stories are true."

He grinned, and not knowing what else to do, Holly quickly leaned in and bumped her head against his. "Don't do anything stupid."

"I'll try," he laughed, seeming much older than his age. "See you, Holly." With that, he turned and flew to the ship where Toothless and Lightning were, watching. Fortunately, they didn't say anything, only exchanged knowing glances.

Earlier, Hiccup had reassured them that their egg was safe with Valka and Cloudjumper, which eased their nervousness somewhat, but not entirely. The couple was ready to go home and try to avoid any more adventures for as long as possible.

When everyone was safely on board, the dragons slowly began to pull the ship around and began the journey back to Berk. Toothless roared back to the Night Furies, who returned his farewell.

A few days later, they arrived back on a snow-covered Berk. A few of the dragons Toothless had sent home greeted them ecstatically, excited to see their Alpha and his mate back safe and sound. The others had made their way to the nesting island to meet the rest of Berk's dragons, along with the Vikings who followed them there every year to help bring back all the new hatchlings.

Up at the top of the cliff, Ash sat patiently with Cloudjumper and Valka, who had a sheet of soft material wrapped around her torso and shoulder, holding a decent-sized oval object against her chest. Behind them, the village square had been overtaken by Snoggletog decorations, including the giant man-made tree the Vikings constructed each year. Clearly they had been busy while their chief was away.

The Vikings who had accompanied Hiccup quickly untied the dragons who had pulled them back and unloaded the ships, eager to get back to their own families to tell them tales of the Island of Night, as they had begun calling it. The name resonated in Hiccup's mind as he remembered reading about such an island in the forged documents

Mildew had snuck into the pile of pages and pages of dragon knowledge that Gobber had given him when he was still a teenager. Of course it was all a ploy by Alvin and the Outcasts to capture him and force him to train their dragons. What an adventure \_that \_had turned out to be. **\*(A/N)\***

Shaking his head, he helped Astrid down the gangplank. "I can walk, Hiccup," she said, sounding exasperated even as she smiled.

"I know, I know. Forgive me for being careful," he laughed, before ducking in to give her a quick kiss on the lips.

Cinder waited with Toothless as a couple of larger dragons lifted Lightning in her nets up to the village to the shelter, where Cloudjumper, Valka, and Ash had moved to meet them and help move her inside. Gobber, Hiccup, and Astrid quickly came up to assist them, and together, they got her on her feet long enough to rest her on the blankets in the back of the room.

The humans backed out, giving Toothless some space. "Rest now, love. Everything is alright."

Lightning closed her eyes and drifted off into a peaceful and dreamless sleep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So. I've been thinking. We've got 80 reviews, but I'm still hopeful that more will trickle in. After all, we're coming up on 20,000 views, which seems cool to me. <strong>

**\*\*How about this. Whoever submits the 100\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\* review, whenever that may be (I'm a mostly patient person), shall receive a sneak peek at the sequel. And if the sequel has already been posted, they shall receive a sneak peek at a future chapter. Same goes to the 100\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\* follower. Sound good? (Remember, you can review any of the chapters.)\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: For those of you who had no idea what I was talking about, "Island of Night" is a reference to an episode from the HTTYD tv show. If you haven't seen it, watch it! It's pretty cute.\*\*

## 39. Chapter 34

**\*\*Had quite an eventful day, so I figured I'd top it off with an update :) only one more chapter after this until it's time for the sequel. Review! My offer still stands. Reviewer #100 gets a peek at what the future holds for our Night Furies, not to mention their humansâ€|\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>A few days later, Lightning woke up. Feeling stiff, she slowly stretched and was pleased to discover that her ribs no longer hurt as much. Toothless was nowhere in sight, although that wasn't a surprise. Yawning, she carefully got to her feet, determined not to fall on her face. <em>One step, twoâ€| <em>She reached the door and

pushed it open, to see a wonderland of snow and holiday decorations. Snoggletog had passed, but that didn't stop the Vikings from enjoying their hard work past the date.

Making her way down the streets, she narrowly evaded a group of Viking children having a snowball fight with a bunch of baby Gronckles and Nadders. \_Ah, yes. \_The dragons must have returned with this year's round of hatchlings, which was always reason to celebrate.

\_Wait.\_ Fear gripped her chest. Where was \_her \_egg? Breaking into a slightly painful jog, she bounded into the square, looking around for any sign of her mate, or even Hiccup or Valka.

"You should be resting," said a voice in her ear. He always managed to sneak up on her, and it always managed to scare her out of her mind.

"Damn it, Toothless!"

"Whoa, calm down, love. It's alright," he said soothingly. "How are you feeling?"

"Better. But, Toothlessâ€¦" she paused. "Where is the egg?"

Something passed over his face that she couldn't identify, and it filled her heart with fear.

"Come on," Toothless said, and he led her back through the snowy streets to the Great Hall. There were a few scattered Vikings drinking mead and swapping stories, but for the most part the atmosphere was very subdued. Closer to the back, Lightning could see a group of humans and dragons gathered in a circle, tables pushed out of the way to accommodate the large reptiles, and curiously she passed Toothless to investigate.

"Whatâ€¦?" Lightning realized that it was Hiccup, Gobber, Valka and Astrid, and that Cloudjumper and Stormfly were with them. But there was something in the middle, something they were all focused on, some of their faces creased with frowns. The fear returned, and she slowly came forward.

Hiccup, noticing her, stepped back and motioned the others to do the same. Finally revealed was a perfect egg on a bed of blankets, \_her \_egg, shining like a black pearl in the firelight. Worry overwhelmed her, and she rushed closer, sniffing it. It smelled alright, and looked alrightâ€¦ so why did everyone seem so concerned?

"What's wrong with it?" she asked in a whisper.

"Well, it hasn't hatched yet," Toothless said, as if it were rather obvious.

"What, you expected it to hatch on its own?" she asked, one eyebrow raised.

"Kind of, yes."

The humans watched their exchange, noting Lightning's obvious relief.

For whatever reason the egg wasn't hatching, it wasn't a bad one.

"Don't you know anything?" Lightning looked at Toothless, who raised one eyebrow in return.

"Not according to you." She laughed, and the sound was a welcome relief to Toothless. "Soâ€¦ you know why it's not hatching?"

"Yep."

"Are you going to tell me?"

"You'll see."

"I'm not sure how much I like mysteries."

"You'll like this one," she responded, focusing on the egg. With her wings, she gestured to everyone to back away, and nervously they did so.

Gently, she rolled the egg off the blankets and swept them aside, letting it sit on the stone floor.

"It just needs a little help," she said simply, and softly began to blow a stream of plasma onto it.

Awed, the humans and dragons leaned in, the light flickering on their faces, and the rest of the Vikings in the Hall ran up to see what was going on. Slowly, small, glowing cracks began appearing on the shell, and Hiccup quickly motioned for everyone to step back, whispering, "It's gonna explode!"

The cracks expanded, and Lightning blew harder, blackening the stones. \_Well, \_Hiccup thought\_, worse things had happened on this floor.\_

Finally, after what seemed like ages, although it had been less than a minute, the egg began rocking back and forth, and quickly Lightning leapt on top of it as it exploded with a loud bang. Lifting her wings and shaking her head from the noise, she peered down between her paws. Where the egg had been a small black shape now rested. Breathlessly she leaned in and whispered, "Hello, little one."

In the center of the curled up form, two large eyes opened, revealing a bright blue to match her own. Grinning, she looked up at Toothless, who looked as shocked as everyone else. "Come here," she demanded, and wordlessly he padded around her to see the little hatchling.

His jaw dropped and he dropped to the ground, leaning in to sniff his child. Around them, the Vikings quietly started to step forward, but sharp looks from Hiccup and Valka sent them in the other direction.

"Come on," Hiccup whispered. "Let's give them some space." They all moved to the other side of the hall, keeping their eyes on the Night Furies.

"It's a boy," Lightning said, and Toothless's eyes widened.

"How do you know?"

She gave him a look that said "Seriously?" before glancing back down to watch as their hatchling uncurled himself, yawning and stretching himself out. Small crumpled wings unfolded and he sat up, blinking.

"He's so small," Toothless said quietly, and the hatchling turned at the sound of his voice, unsteadily getting to his feet, before stumbling over to his father and climbing between his forelegs to curl himself up again.

Toothless looked like his eyes were going to pop out of his head, and Lightning couldn't help her smile. "I bet someday he'll be even bigger than his dad."

"So," he said, "what should we name him?"

"I'm not sure," she confessed. "I didn't have all that much time to think about it."

"Well, I was thinkingâ€¦" he paused, hesitant. "Maybe we could name himâ€¦ Shade?"

"Shade?" If dragons could cry, Lightning would definitely be bawling. "It's perfect."

"\_He's \_perfect."

Just then, the doors to the hall burst open and two black forms tumbled along the floor, trailing snow.

"Is Lightning in here?" Cinder called.

"We heard she's awake!" shouted Ash.

Toothless and Lightning looked at each other and laughed. "We're back here!"

The two young Night Furies ran around the enormous fireplace, skidding to a halt when they spied the small creature resting between Toothless's front legs.

"Oh!" Ash said, before delight overcame her surprise. "The baby!" She darted forward, pressing against Lightning as she leaned forward to see him better. "What's his name? Is it a he?"

"His name is Shade. Do you want to see him?"

"Oh, yes," she whispered. She quickly dropped to the ground and Toothless carefully lifted Shade up and over to rest on her front legs. Awestruck, she lifted one paw and held it over his face. Wide awake, he reached up and batted at it with his own tiny paws, causing her to giggle with surprise. "You and I are going to be the best of friends, Shade. I just know it."

Cinder came up much more slowly, eyeing the small baby dubiously. "Is he supposed to be that small?" he asked.

"You were this small once, too." Lightning said.

"No way!"

Hiccup couldn't stay away. Slowly he made his way back over to them, making sure that Toothless and Lightning saw him coming.

His dragon looked over and grinned toothlessly, and Hiccup smiled in return, walking up and crouching down next to Ash, who was still playing with the little hatchling. "Can I seeâ€| him?" Toothless nodded, and gently he pulled the baby away from Ash. Holding him under his front legs, he lifted the hatchling up to eye level, meeting the dragon's bright blue gaze. "He's amazing, Toothless."

His dragon could only nod in agreement.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>We have a hatchling! I think it might be time for another baby to come along, too. Wouldn't you agree?<strong>

\*\*(OOOOOOH only a few more reviews... come on, don't you have \_any \_interest in what happens in the sequel?）\*\*

#### 40. Epilogue

Winter slowly turned to spring, and then to a beautiful summer.

Hiccup paced back and forth, wearing a track in the dirt.

"Lad, yer not helpin' anything with all that walkin'," Gobber grumbled.

"Aye," said Spitelout. "These things happen in their own time."

"Ugh!" Hiccup cried out, turning towards an understanding Toothless, who sat lounging in the sun with his mate and their hatchling. Little Shade was chasing Ash and Cinder around, having grown significantly in the past months. Their laughter was apparent even to the humans, who heard the rumbles in their chests and couldn't help but laugh along.

"Well, statistically speaking-" Fishlegs started, before Ruffnut punched him in the arm.

"Shut up, idiot!"

"Bud, I'm going to go insane, here," Hiccup told his dragon, who just nodded sympathetically. He warbled his support before turning to rumble something at Lightning, who seemed to laugh just a little bit, but hid her amusement when Hiccup turned to glare at her.

"Even the dragons are handling this better than you, Hiccup," said Snotlout lazily from his seat on the hillside next to Tuffnut, who appeared to be chewing on some grass.



"You just wait, Snotlout. Your time will come!" Hiccup announced, pointing at his cousin.

A cry of pain could be heard from inside the house, and Hiccup paled, looking like he was going to throw up. Moments later, the door cracked open and his mother stuck her head out, her hair slightly messy, but she was smiling.

"Come on, son."

Hiccup slowly followed her into the house, up the stairs, through his bedroom door, and time stopped.

Sitting upright in bed was a flushed but smiling Astrid, and in her arms was a small bundle with a tuft of auburn hair sticking up out of it. "Come here, you troll," she said, laughing as she patted the bed next to her. Somehow, Hiccup made his way to her side, as their mothers and the midwives quietly exited the room.

"It's a girl," she whispered, turning to look at his white face. "You look like you just saw the Flightmare, Hiccup. Sit down. Do you want to hold her?"

Nodding, he held out his hands. "No, like \_this,\_" Astrid said, adjusting his arms before gently depositing the bundle into his embrace. Without thinking his grip tightened ever so slightly to hold her up, and he looked down into the most amazing sight he'd ever laid eyes upon.

"She looks kind of like a tiny Gothi," he said, and Astrid burst out laughing.

"She won't be that wrinkled for long. Just look at her, though."

He did, and then she opened her eyes, and it was like looking into a mirror. "She has my eyes!" he exclaimed.

"And your hair," Astrid added.

Hiccup couldn't speak.

"Too bad she has such attractive parents," she joked. "We'll be fighting off the village boys with swords and shields!"

Hiccup moaned. "Don't say such things. I can't handle that yet."

A little while later, Hiccup peeked out his front door to see what appeared to be all of Berk gathered outside his house. Ducking back in, he leaned in to kiss his wife, careful not to crush the bundle between them. Holding his daughter in one arm and Astrid's hand in the other, he pushed open the door.

The village went silent as their Chief stepped into the sunlight, and their eyes immediately fixated on the bundle in his right arm. "People of Berk!" he proclaimed, but not too loudly. He didn't want to startle the baby, after all. "Astrid has given me a healthy baby girl!"

The crowd erupted into cheers, and Hiccup had to let go of Astrid's hand to wave at them to calm down. "Her name is Aeri, and I'm sure

she'd love to meet you all, but you're going to have to wait a while," he grinned crookedly. "Family first, you know."

Grumbling but extraordinarily excited, the villagers turned around and headed down the hill, back to their daily tasks.

Left behind were a group of dragons. Five Night Furies, a Stormcutter, and a Deadly Nadder, along with his mother, whose face was lit up by a wide smile.

"Well, come on!" Hiccup gestured to them, and they all piled inside. He opened the side shutters for Cloudjumper and Stormfly, while the Night Furies gathered around in a circle.

Hiccup went to the middle of the rug and sat cross-legged, holding Aeri upright for the dragons to see. She was already dramatically less wrinkled, which was a relief to her father. "All right, Toothless. You first."

The black dragon quietly stepped forward, leaning in to see curious green eyes gazing back up at him. He smiled at the sight, when little Shade ran forward and raised himself up, peering at Aeri's tiny face. He sniffed at her, blue eyes wide. Her arm pulled free of her blankets, and everyone watched with bated breath to see what would happen.

Shade leaned forward, sniffing her hand, then pushed his nose into her palm.

Hiccup doubted that the movement was intentional on Aeri's part, but Shade had made up his mind. Aeri was his human now, and that was that. The baby gurgled, then dropped her arm, obviously growing tired.

"Okay, guys," Hiccup addressed them all, Astrid and Valka smiling behind him. "It's nap time for us humans, but I'll be out to see you all later. Thank you," he said to Toothless, patting his dragon's head.

As the dragons filed out the front door, Toothless leaned down to his son. "Do you know what you just did?" he asked him, uncertain.

Shade, looking serious, nodded, before taking off after Cinder and Ash once more.

Laughing, Lightning came up next to him and nuzzled his neck. Toothless looked out over the village, at all of the humans and dragons working together. He could see Ash and Cinder, closely pursued by his own son, and he glanced down at his mate, whose blue eyes rose to meet his green ones.

An emotion swelled in his chest, and he didn't try to suppress it. For loneliness was a demon of the distant past. No, this was fulfillment, this was love, this was happiness. There was no regret. Whatever change was to come, as long as he had his family and friends around him, they would make it through.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hello, friends :) I hope you've enjoyed this story as much as I've enjoyed writing it. I will post a notice here when I release the beginning of the sequel. I'm thinking some time in the next few weeks, but seeing as how I've made a lot of progress on it, I <em>could <em>be persuaded to post it sooner, so please, be vocal about your opinions. It's gonna be good, but I expect some constructive reviews from you all, so keep that in mind!\*\*

\*\*Thank you to all of you, my faithful math monkeys, as I have started thinking of you. Here's to more adventures to come!\*\*

#### 41. AN

And... the sequel is up. Apparently it might take some time for it to show up, but it has been posted.

I hope you enjoy it.

-MM

PS Thank you to all of my incredible reviewers, you give me the will to go on!

PPS to the reviewer EB: Fan art! If you see this, that would be so incredible and I would love to see it. Excitement!

PPPS We have passed 70,000 views eeeeep so awesome! Thank you all!

UPDATE: I've been writing one-shots that take place between OtN and the sequel and the first, A New Baby Sister, is up, in case any of you are interested :)

An update to the UPDATE: Another in-between story has been posted, it's a two-shot called Nightmare, so be on the lookout for the second chapter. Woohoo!

#### 42. Author's Note 2

\*\*Author's Note 5/3/2015\*\*

\*\*Hello friends!\*\*

\*\*I just wanted to let you know that the sequel, Choices, Change, and Fate, is now significantly longer than Of the Night and shows no sign of slowing down. I \*\*\*\*\_highly \_\*\*\*\*recommend that you read it, especially if you're looking for more Toothless. He shows up in the more recent chapters, along with Lightning and some of our other old favorites. You might be surprised at how well it's moving along, just give Aeri and Shade a chance. A whole lot of awesome is going down and I'd hate for you to miss it.\*\*

\*\*Cheers!\*\*

\*\*\_MM\*\*

End

file.